ALL-STORY

COMBINED WITH MUNSEY

Love Stories *of the* American Girl

On Sale Every Other Wednesday

March 8

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The Marriage Tra

Thrilling Novelette

By

Madeleine S. Buchana

Love at West Point

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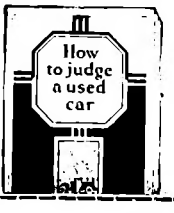

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*Based on the combined experiences of F. B. Englehardt, Chattanooga, Tenn.; A. F. Thompson, Sioux City, Iowa; L. D. Mathers, of E. Cleveland, Ohio, and many others.

Caught in a Rut

I wonder I put up with it as long as I did! Every day was filled with nothing but deadly routine and monotonous detail. No freedom or independence. No chance to get out and meet people, travel, nor have interesting experiences. I was just like a cog in a big machine with poor prospects of ever being anything more.

Long, Tiresome Hours

Every hour of the day I was under somebody's supervision. The TIME-CLOCK constantly laid in wait for me—a monument to unfulfilled hopes and dying ambition. Four times a day, promptly on the dot, it hurled its silent challenge at my self-respect, reminding me how unimportant I was and how little I really COUNTED in the business and social world!

Low Pay

Paid just enough to keep going—but never enough to enjoy any of the GOOD things of life every man DESERVES for his family and himself. Always economizing and pinching pennies. Always wondering what I would do if I were laid off or lost my job. Always uncertain and apprehensive of the future.

Desperate

Happened to get a look at the payroll one day and was astonished to see what big salaries went to the sales force. Found that salesman Brown made $200 a week—and Jenkins $275! Would have given my right arm to make money that fast, but never dreamed I had any "gift" for salesmanship.

A Ray of Light

Stumbled across an article on salesmanship in a magazine that evening. Was surprised to discover that salesmen were made and not "born" as I had foolishly believed. Read about a former cowpuncher, Wm. Shore of California, making $525 in one week after learning the ins-and-outs of scientific salesmanship. Decided that if HE could do it, so could I!

The Turning Point

My first step was to write for a certain little book which a famous business genius has called "The MOST AMAZING BOOK EVER PRINTED." It wasn't a very *big* book, but it certainly opened my eyes to things I had never *dreamed* of—and proved the turning point of my entire career!

What I Discovered

Between the pages of this remarkable volume, I discovered hundreds of little known facts and secrets that revealed the REAL TRUTH about the science of selling! It wasn't a bit as I had imagined. I found out that it was governed by simple rules and laws that almost ANY man can master as easily as he learned the alphabet. I even learned how to go about getting into this "highest paid of all professions." I found out exactly how Mark Barichievich of San Francisco was enabled to quit his $8 a week job as a restaurant-worker and start making $125 a week as a salesman; and how C. W. Birmingham of Dayton, Ohio, jumped from $15 a week to $7500 a year—these and *hundreds* of others! It certainly *was* a revelation!

FREE Employment Service

Furthermore, I discovered that the National Salesmen's Training Association, which published the book, also operates a most effective employment service! Last year they received requests from all over the U. S. and Canada for more than 50,000 salesmen trained by their method. This service is FREE to both members and employers and thousands have secured positions this way!

Making Good At Last!

It didn't take me long to decide to cast my lot with N. S. T. A.—and after a few weeks I had mastered the secrets of Modern Salesmanship during spare time, without losing a day or a dollar from my old job. When I was ready, the Employment Manager found me over a dozen good openings to choose from—and I selected one which paid me over $70 a week to start!

Was It Worth It?

Today my salary is $4800 greater than ever before! No more punching time-clocks or worrying over dimes and quarters! NOW my services are in REAL DEMAND with bigger prospects for the future than I ever dared HOPE for back in those days when I was just another "name" on a pay-roll!

GET YOUR COPY FREE

Right now the book—"The Key to Master Salesmanship"—which banished all my fears and troubles and showed me how to get started on the road to success and independence—will be mailed as a gift to any ambitious man, absolutely FREE. And since there is no obligation, why not see for yourself what amazing facts it contains! Just mail the coupon now—for there is no better way in the world to invest a 2-cent stamp! I KNOW!

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ALL-STORY

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Volume III—No. 4 *Love Stories of the American Girl* March 8, 1930

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On a bundle of rags lay the loveliest girl he had ever seen!

The Unkept Tryst

One mad moment in which they found love—then for five long years he sought her, his only clew a blood-red ruby glimpsed against her rags. Why had she fled from him?

By Betty Bennett

THE car swerved eastward from Madison Avenue. It speeded through the poorly lit street, past Park Avenue, past Lexington, toward the docks and the East River. The neighborhood was changing rapidly. Old buildings half torn down now, empty houses, closed shops.

"Hell's bells! Where's he taking me?" exclaimed the handsome young man in the back seat.

He was still upset from the sudden telephone call he had received. Perhaps after he got used to it, to be awakened at two in the morning would be common enough, but, having opened his own office only yesterday, the young doctor had never before at this hour been dragged out on a call.

He heard again the clamoring telephone, his sleepy response, the excited rush of words: "Some one's hurt! Come at once? A car will call for you," then the slammed down receiver.

Why hadn't he been given an address, asked to come to his patient? Doing so would have saved time. Something was very strange, he saw it now—too late.

His eyes leaped to the youth tense at the wheel. The boyish face looked trustworthy enough, but he certainly had been mysteriously silent about their destination. Perhaps he was a decoy.

Stories came to the apprehensive young man of doctors commandeered to patch up men wounded in gang fights and attempted murders; doctors, their task done, killed on the theory that dead men tell no tales!

THE car jolted to a stop. "Follow me," the boy commanded, and started up a dark alleyway.

"I believe I could get away now," the young doctor reflected. But he found himself going on, his heart increasing its beat with a sense of adventure.

At the rear of a building the boy opened a door giving upon a stairway. He lit a candle, and again bidding the doctor "Follow," began ascending.

The stairs were far from clean, the air close, musty. Only their footsteps broke the silence.

The boy pushed open a door. A barnlike room with cracked walls took shadowy form. There was no attempt at beauty. Sheer poverty. A dining room table, a sputtering candle, boxes for chairs. A cot and — the doctor nearly cried out in amazement!

On a bunch of rags for a pillow lay the loveliest little face he had seen in all his life. Skin of creamy olive, features, especially the small nose, beautifully chiseled; brown curls falling in ringlets to make a heart turn over.

The young girl—she could have been no more than sixteen or seventeen, the doctor decided — looked up with big brown frightened eyes. A moment and they grew wide and starry with pain.

"It's her shoulder," the boy explained quickly.

The doctor dropped to his knees.

"You've dislocated it," he informed his patient, "and setting it back into place, I'm going to have to hurt you."

She clenched her teeth together. Only once did she give way to a moan as he went about his painful task. She was gritty!

The doctor's mind teemed with questions. Were these two, of the same rich coloring and delicacy of feature, brother and sister? Why were they in this disreputable neighborhood? What had made the girl look so afraid?

He noticed on her hand a ring of marvelous beauty, a square cut ruby, crimson as a drop of blood. His glance told that it was genuine. How could she, so poor, have a ring so costly?

"Thieves, and it's part of the loot," flashed to his brain.

"No, it can't be so," he told himself angrily. Yet she seemed to be afraid, and the lad was plainly upset. What mystery dwelt here?

The doctor asked questions as casually as he could. How had she been hurt? Had they lived here long?

The answers were vague, noncommittal.

"No use trying to win their confidence to-night," he decided. "To-morrow will be better."

So he bade his lovely patient good night and presently was before his apartment. He told the boy: "I'll have another look at her to-morrow."

"Never mind!" came the agitated

answer. And the young doctor found himself staring at a red light disappearing down the street.

In his hands was a greenback and in his memory was an odd look—was it fear? — that had crossed the lad's face.

THE next afternoon a roadster cruised patiently about an East River neighborhood.

"There's the house!" The doctor, speaking to his friend, stopped his car with a sudden shrieking of brakes.

"Talk sense," was the answer. "See that For Rent sign?"

"That *is* strange," answered the doctor. "But I'm sure it's the house."

The two friends pounded at the front door, then at the back. But there was no response.

They went to the only house in the block that showed signs of life. An old lady answered their queries.

"Yes, it's for rent, I guess. No one's lived there for years."

"Told you you were loony," his friend teased the doctor.

"And I tell you it's the house! Maybe they're caretakers. Come on," he said stubbornly, "we're going to break in."

To do so was not difficult. When the back door gave way, they saw a flight of stairs before them.

"Just as I thought." The doctor was already mounting the stairs. "Hurry up!" he cried elatedly.

But when he reached the top: "Well, I'll be hanged! Darn! I can't believe it!"

His friend, rushing up excitedly, found him staring at a big room devoid of furniture, of all signs of life!

"In this neighborhood the houses all look alike," his friend tried to console him. "Come on, let's get out. Of all your wild goose chases, this is the wildest yet."

"I still believe this is the place," the doctor replied firmly.

"Good heavens, man! Do you think people vanish over night? Fold up their furniture into a valise and call their private airplane? You know darn well this can't be your hovel of mystery."

But the doctor continued to stare at the crumbling walls and worn floor. He'd been so sure that—

Suddenly he gave an exclamation. Tense with excitement, he bent down to an object on the floor.

It was a ring of marvelous beauty, and in it glittered a square cut ruby, crimson as a drop of blood!

"TAKE me along, Bob! Take me along!" Two small hands twisted themselves together, and a face whose skin was of childlike beauty, whose eyes were dark and eloquent, and above which was a head covered with ringlets to make a man's heart turn over, looked at the slim boy who had her own rich coloring.

"Babs, a ship's no place for you. Didn't we have that out long ago? And with your arm in a sling, you ought to take care of yourself."

The childish expression of pleading vanished from the girl's face.

"It's a better place than any I have. Ogre's back. He was at me again this morning."

"Oh, honey, honey!" The boy's voice broke with pity and sorrow.

These two slender beings were not only brother and sister, but twins, drawn together since childhood by common trials and sorrows.

"You thought last night was the first time," the girl went on, "but it wasn't. I didn't let you know before.

I thought you'd worry, but now—I'm *afraid.*"

"Oh, the brute—the low down brute! I guess you're right, Sis. You'd better come along. We'll get jobs in Bermuda if we can and not come back to New York."

"I knew you'd let me come," the girl said softly. "See," she pointed to a bundle of books and a cardboard box, "I've brought all my things."

"Then it's for us to stick together, Sis."

"What 'd I do without you, Bob?" A little smile lifted the corners of his sister's lips.

"Heaven knows, Sis!" he returned affectionately. "Probably get lost or eaten by bears or—say, we'd better go call on the captain. You seem to think I'm the boss of this ship, but I'm not. Thank heaven, though he swears like a parrot, he has a kind heart."

He picked up the boxes and they hurried to the ship.

A tall young man who had heard every word of their conversation turned and ran at breakneck speed to a roadster parked at the corner.

Several hours later the sturdy freighter, White Gander, plowed from its East River dock to the open sea.

BABS took her two cheap dresses out of the box and laid them on her bunk. She didn't want them to get all mussed. Her eyes were shining, and her cheeks flushed. Never having been away from New York, she was excited to be going to Bermuda.

They had left land an hour ago, and she had explored the whole ship, from poop deck to engine room. The gruff old captain, taking a fancy to her, had said the ship was hers, cargo and all.

She was going on deck again now, and there would soon be the noon meal. There was something exciting about eating on board ship, even though they would probably have canned salmon and beans. And how thrilling it was to think of the days on shipboard to come!

It would get warmer and warmer until they reached Bermuda, the captain had said; the sea would grow bluer and bluer until it would seem as if all the blue in the world were held in the waters.

"Wonder if it's getting blue yet," thought the girl.

She hurried up on deck.

Two voices in argument carried to her. Then a voice she recognized as the captain's, angry, swearing a steady stream, drowned out the other.

"Gracious! I've got to find out what's going on," she breathed.

The salty wind lashed the curls about her eager face, whipped the little tan skirt against her legs as she ran forward.

She went as near as she dared. Though she couldn't see him, she heard the captain swearing, and she could hear the other voice now. She didn't need one familiar with the sea to explain what had happened. A stowaway had been discovered in one of the lifeboats.

He was pleading:

"Don't send me back. Don't, for God's sake, don't!"

The young man was very earnest. He simply *had* to go to sea. He'd work his head off, he'd do anything to be permitted to remain. He had—

To her sorrow, she missed the rest of the sentence. One word sounded like "holice." What was holice?

She liked the man's voice, and thought sympathetically: "Oh, I hope he isn't sent back!"

She risked a peep at the stranger. He was tall, fair haired, and was wearing a gray suit too small for him, so torn that she wondered if he had been in a fight. Yet even dressed so, there was something commanding about him with his athletic build. He was erect, broad shouldered, with a firm and daring chin, and a strong mouth that looked as if it often smiled. A lock of hair fell over his broad forehead.

They turned aft, and she watched them disappear, the grizzled old man whose walk told unmistakably of the sea, and the younger, taller man whose hair in the sun was so blond.

A warmth glowed within her, causing her eyes to shine like stars.

THE sea was a great molten jewel about the ship as she stood four days later with her elbows on the rail, her face cupped in her hands. She was reviewing the past days.

Hours listening to the weathered old captain and his tales of far lands. Hours sitting contentedly on deck, study books in her lap. Hours tramping, laughing, chatting with Phillip Huyler.

It was of these hours that she thought most. Was there in all the world such delightful, satisfying company as he? He was so friendly, so full of high spirits. And clever. He seemed to know everything. He'd even been to Bermuda before!

He was coming toward her now,

For years she was to remember this scene. The happiest hour of her life!

tall, erect, and good to look at, singing in a rich barytone: "Irish eyes are smiling, sure it's like a morn in June . . ."

"You're always singing," she greeted him.

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I'll think it over and tell you later."

He answered with a laugh and she laughed, too. The moment he appeared, all her worries and cares disappeared as if they had fallen overboard and been drowned.

"Chaperoning the flying fish this morning?" he asked. "Elephants! Look at all of them over there."

Her bright eyes viewed them, their slender bodies sailing a few feet above the water, then dropping in as their wings dried.

"If I were a fish I'd like to be a flying one," she observed. "I like them!"

"You like most everything, don't you, Babba?" turning his eyes that were the color of the sea upon her. "I believe that's why I like *you*. You're not blasé like most girls. You're keen about things." His voice was warm with approval.

Color flooded her cheeks. Oh, she was glad that this fair-haired young man did like her! She'd never really had a friend among men before. Twice boys she'd met in school had asked her places, but Bob hadn't approved of them. Not wanting to hurt her brother, she hadn't gone with them.

She wanted to tell Phillip now that she was glad he liked her, but she was at a loss for words, so she just said: "Tell me about Bermuda."

"Well, people there are always swimming, because even in January and February the water's warm. And clear as glass. You can see the bottom and all the fishes, gayly colored as birds, swimming about. When you go out in the glass-bottomed boats you'll see the sea gardens—ferns and anemones and weeds of all colors down among the coral."

"They must be wonderful!"

"There will be flowers, millions of them—hibiscus, oleanders, bougainvillæa, Spanish bayonet, sea lavender and marigold. Some parts of the islands are called Fairyland. But most beautiful of all are the moonlight nights. Sailboats are everywhere. I'll have to take you sailing, shall I, Babs?"

"I'd love to go! I can hardly wait to get there!" she declared. "Oh, I do hope I can get a job I like, and Bob, too. We're going to study hard," she went on enthusiastically, "and maybe in a year go to college, work our way through. Mother made us promise before she died—we were ten, then—to get an education."

"Father living, Babba?"

She shook her head.

"And so you and Bob live alone in New York?"

"What made you think that? No, we never have—we—I mean," she faltered. An unhappy, furtive look crept into her eyes. She ended jerkily: "We've left New York for good. We—we've nothing to take us back there—ever! Bob and I both want to stay here."

"Your brother doesn't think much of me, does he?" the man asked thoughtfully.

She hesitated, embarrassed, then confessed: "He says he has a reason. Once he told me he thought he'd seen you some place before."

The man was plainly startled. "Where did he think he'd—"

"Oh, no place special. You know

how you're always seeing people that remind you of some one; but I don't think," she said regretfully, "that he does like you. He may not want me to go places with you."

"I think I know why he doesn't approve of me," Phillip informed her, "and there's no truth in it."

"I'm glad."

"And you believe me?" he asked, as if the matter were very important indeed.

"Yes."

She turned her gaze from him to the sea and the sky of wondrous blue. Somehow she seemed to be sailing not just to Bermuda, but to some unknown magic heaven. Did Phillip have anything to do with it?

AT the end of a week in Bermuda the promise of heaven was still about her. She and Bob had found two small rooms which were given them free for Babs taking care of the rest of the house. Bob had left almost at once for St. George's and a job, to be gone a week. He would return to-morrow.

Babs's friendship with Phillip had grown by leaps and bounds. He had taken her sightseeing—to Cahou Lake that was under ground, in a grotto made of stalactites gleaming like crystal icicles, and to Gibb's lighthouse with its sweeping view of ocean and coral islands. At the Palm Garden he had tried patiently, gayly, to teach her to dance.

And now, one week after arriving, they had come sailing.

A magic spell, it seemed to Babs, was all about them. A spell made up of a tropic moon pouring forth its silver beauty; stars singing in the heavens, sailboats like moths in the moonlight.

"Why so quiet, Babba? You're not saying a word." Phillip's tone was rich and warm.

"I'm too happy to talk, I guess," she answered with a soft smile.

The sailboat glided on in silence, leaving a trail of silver ripples.

"Penny for your thoughts."

"I was thinking of those girls in evening clothes in the sailboat we just passed and wishing I was like them," Babs replied wistfully.

"Babba, Babba! Don't! I've known girls of their type — cold hearts and mercenary thoughts. You with your brown pansy eyes, in that little yellow dress, are so—so far above them, Babba. Tender, unspoiled, sweet — so sweet."

She didn't answer.

"Babba, are you angry? Don't you like me to say nice things to you?"

"Oh, yes!" she confessed; "but when you do, I don't know what to answer."

Phillip's words were scarcely audible as he questioned: "Babba, would you like me to say—that I loved you?"

"Do you *mean* that?" She gazed up into his clear eyes, her own bewildered, yet strangely stirred.

"I'd die for you, Babba!" he said simply. "There'll never be any other woman for me. Most girls to-day don't bring out the deepest love of a man's heart, but you—oh, Babba, *honey-dear!* I'd give anything on earth for you, anything, Babba!"

With a little intake of breath, she buried her face hard against his shoulder.

"Babba dear, what's the matter? You—are you *crying?*"

"I—I'm just so happy."

"Then—then you do care?" he cried exultantly.

"Oh, I do—like everything, but I

don't see—see how you can—can love just me!"

His lips were on her soft curls.

"Babba, Babba, that's so like you not to see! And that's why—why you're so darn unspoiled and sweet."

A moment later he chided: "Do you realize you haven't kissed me, and we—we're engaged?"

"I wanted to," her gentle voice confessed, "but you didn't ask me to."

He let out a little groan. "Babba, you're just so sweet I—I can't stand it! You're going to have me all weeping myself!"

"Kiss me," she said tensely and raised her lips.

For years and years she was to remember their first kisses, his words to her and hers to him, the moon pouring down its magic light and loveliness as they found love.

And so the happiest hour of her life went by.

Leaving the sea behind, arm in arm, they walked from the silent dock up a path of oleanders. The fragrance of the flowers was about them, the starlight above.

He opened his arms and caught her close for a last good night kiss. Then he told her: "I'll have to be away all day, but to-morrow night I'll be waiting by the oleanders at the usual time."

"And I'll be here," she promised, not knowing what was to come. "Good night, Phillip."

"Good night, honey-dear."

But still they stood there, silvered with moonlight, staring into each other's eyes.

"Lord, it's hard to part," Phillip whispered.

"It's awful! As if you'd be gone for a thousand years instead of just a night!" Babs whispered back.

Once more he kissed her, twice, three times, as though he could never get enough, as if time were short.

BABS tried the next morning to make herself feel and act as if it were just an ordinary day. But she couldn't. She wanted to shout last night's miracle to the whole world. She wanted to cry out to every one:

"Life is all different from yesterday. Phillip loves me! He's so wonderful. I don't know how it happened, but God let him care for me."

In the afternoon she went to the beach. Dreaming, she lay on the coral sands. She didn't see the swimmers or the turquoise sea. She was living over again all that had happened last night. Every caress, every compliment of Phillip's had become a precious jewel that she could take from her treasure chest of yesterday and gaze at in wonder and delight.

At six she went home.

"I'm glad Bob is coming back today!" she thought as she left the beach. To him she could pour out her overflowing heart. She'd convince him, now that she was so sure of herself, how wonderful Phillip was. Not having approved of him, her brother most likely would object at first, but she could make him see as she did. Maybe he'd think it all right for her to be married at once!

But she found the house deserted, and sat down on the stone steps. A dozen carriages rolled by, countless bicycles. A native sought to sell her bananas.

At last Bob appeared with his cream shirt all wet with perspiration, but, somehow, in spite of it, looking in his young slimness, clean and likable.

"Hello, Sis! How's every little thing? Any bears get you?"

She raised welcoming lips to him.

"I've got to change my clothes in a rush," he went on, "and see the White Gander off. It's sailing in an hour. Want to—why, Babs, what is it?"

Her bright eyes, her flushed cheeks had betrayed her.

"I'm engaged!" she burst forth.

"You're *what?*"

"Engaged — engaged to Phillip Huyler!" Her brown eyes were shining like stars, her cheeks pink as roses.

"Babs, you don't *mean* that?"

"Of course! Why do you look at me like that?" Babs cried, with an odd sinking at her heart.

"Because, if it's true, it's the most terrible thing you ever said. Phillip Huyler is wanted by the police; that's why he rushed from New York. A sailor overheard him tell the captain, and the crew all knew."

"Bob!" she cried, as if he had stabbed her.

"I'd have told you if I'd known he meant anything to you."

She remembered that scene on deck when the stowaway was discovered. "Don't send me back! Don't for God's sake, send me back!" and then that word she had not understood—"holice." Yes, it must have been police!

The whole world rocked about her.

"Sis, why didn't you tell me you were going with him?" her brother asked reproachfully.

"I would have," she sobbed brokenly, "but you went off the very first morning here and—" She couldn't go on because of her tears.

"Oh, honey, don't cry like that!" Bob put his arm about her. "Honey, honey!"

PRESENTLY she raised her tear-stained face. Hope was in her eyes. "Phillip thought you didn't like him, said he knew why, and that it wasn't true. I don't believe he's done anything wrong," she asserted with a growing conviction.

But Bob shook his head. "You're the type of woman to believe in any man you loved, Sis. And you wouldn't be the first whom love had made blind."

"Bob, I know he's done nothing wrong!" Babs cried loyally, ashamed to have doubted him.

"You believe in him because you want to believe in him, Sis. Of course he'd tell you he was innocent. You *are* a child if you don't see that. And you've got to give him up."

"I won't give him up! I can't!"

"My good grief, Sis! Don't you see you must? Why, you've no business talking about marriage anyhow. You haven't known men. You think you're in love with him just because he's the first man who's made a fuss over you. You're too young to—"

"I'd be willing to wait a year or two," she offered humbly.

Her brother was distrait. His little sister, his charge since baby days, losing her head over a man like Phillip Huyler!

A solution occurred to him and filled him with relief.

"The White Gander sails at seven thirty," he informed her. "*We're going with it.*"

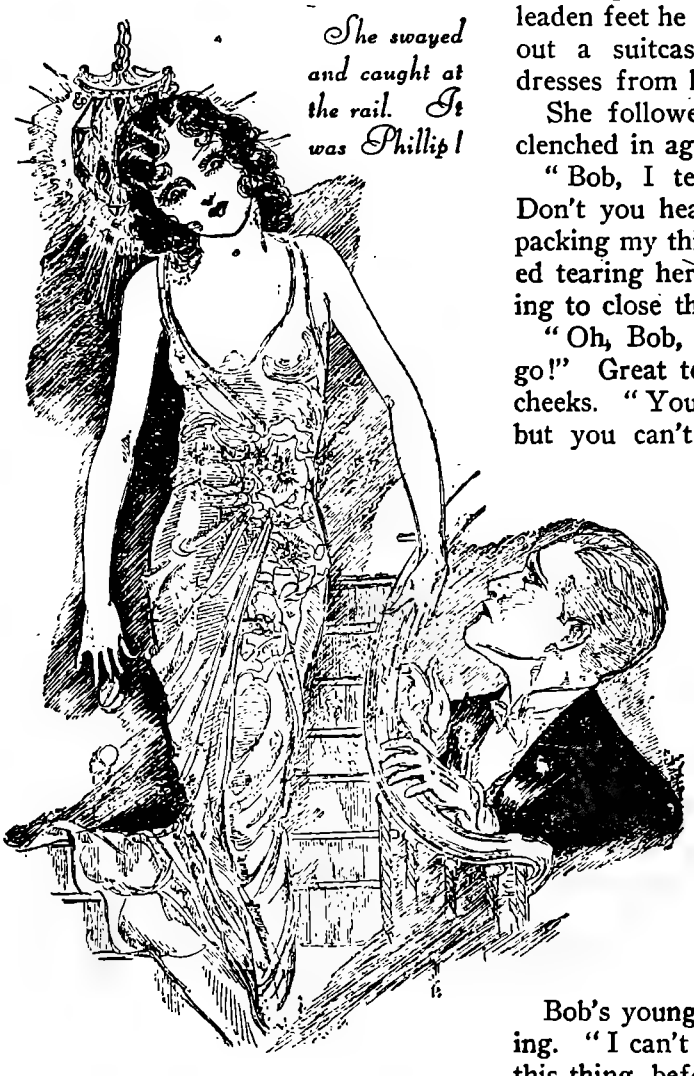
She gave a little cry. "Oh, no, no! I couldn't go and leave Phillip. You don't know what you're *asking* me."

"There's just time to pack in," he said firmly.

"I'm not going, I tell you! I can't, not when Phillip loves me and I love him. We couldn't give each other up. Having each other means all our life's happiness. I've always done what you wanted me to before, but this time—I don't see how you can—"

"Honey, my love for you won't let me stand aside and see you ruin your life!"

"It would be ruining my life to *leave!* Oh, Bob, don't you see I love



She swayed and caught at the rail. It was Phillip!

him? Don't you understand"—her voice broke—"that I'd as soon die as give him up? Even if he's a criminal, I—I want him more than all else in life. That's how I love him!"

Bob gave a little moan. His little sister, who had always yielded so gently to reason, now opposing him with a stubbornness and will he had never known she possessed. There was only one way out. He must take her away.

"I'll pack for us both," he said. On leaden feet he went to his room, hauled out a suitcase and took down her dresses from her room.

She followed him, her little hands clenched in agony.

"Bob, I tell you I'm not going! Don't you hear me? Bob, Bob, stop packing my things. Bob!" She started tearing her dresses from him, trying to close the suitcase.

"Oh, Bob, don't you see? I *can't* go!" Great tears streamed down her cheeks. "You can pound me, beat me, but you can't make me go. I love Phillip, oh, I love him so! I never knew a person could care as I care for him. You just don't understand. He's everything in life to me. I can't leave him behind, I can't, I love him a thousand times too much. I'd go to the ends of the earth for him, I'd go through hell for him. Nothing you can say or do can make me leave or give him up."

Bob's young face showed his suffering. "I can't let you go through with this thing, before God I can't!"

"You can't force me to leave! I stay with Phillip!"

"If you don't come with me, if you make me fail in my duty to you, then I might as well end my life, Sis." Her brother's voice was deadly as he added: "I shall kill myself there at sea."

"Bob!"

It was a stark cry of tragedy. She knew her brother, she knew his love for her, and she knew that he meant what he said.

And she fell upon the suitcase, sobbing and sobbing. Life was more than she could bear. Bob wanting her to give up Phillip! How could she? How *could* she? She *had* to have him!

But Bob cared for her, felt his responsibility so much that he'd kill himself because he thought she was doing wrong. Bob, far older than his years, who had always looked after her, who had let her come here because of the nightmare of their past.

Bob's eyes, as he looked at her, had aged by years. He thought to himself, "Oh, poor Sis, even if it's for the best, to have to hurt you like this!"

At last she choked brokenly: "I'll go, Bob. Have you a pencil? I'll write Phil a note."

"I think you'd better not, Babs. And there's not time."

She couldn't keep back her sobs as she picked up her few possessions.

"He'll be waiting by the oleanders," she thought, "and I won't come! He'll think I don't love him. He'll not know that all the rest of my life I'll care. Oh, Phillip, Phillip!"

THE White Gander ran into three storms on the return journey, so it was not strange that Babs was seasick. But it was not seasickness that made her look so wan and pale. It was a sickness of the heart.

Only Phillip could have brought back the color to her cheeks, and she could not have Phillip.

She'd be game, she'd try to go on living. She'd even try to *want* to live, but it would be to no avail. The future stretched before her blacker than night, for night passes and the sun comes; but for her there would never again be the sun. Phillip was gone.

At last the long journey came to an end.

She and Bob left New York at once and took up quarters in a cheap little boarding house in the university town of Syracuse. There Bob secured a job in an architect's office, Babs in a book store.

Five years passed.

"YOU look wonderful to-night, Babs. No wonder your picture was in the New York *Times* as one of the prettiest co-eds in the State!"

A tinkling laugh broke from the soft red lips of the girl addressed. Babs, a senior in college now, was poised, sure of herself. Compliments no longer made her blush.

"What you trying to work me for, Tommy?" she queried gayly.

"To marry me, of course!"

The sound of an orchestra within, sobbing out its heart over "Why Was I Born?" carried plaintively to them on the sorority house porch.

"After graduation next month you'll forget you even proposed to me."

"Listen here!" Tommy said with real anger. "You know blooming well that—"

"That you'll meet some one else, fall twice as hard, have a home and five kids," Babs interrupted impishly.

"I won't! I won't, if for no other reason than pure stubbornness!"

They both laughed, the young man in evening clothes, son of a wealthy Buffalo banker, and the very pretty girl in the alluring dance frock of amber satin.

"Besides," Tommy continued,

"every one thinks we're engaged. Bill does, even your own roommate is positive we'll be married this—"

"Which in itself is sufficient reason why I should marry you!"

"Babs, you never take anything seriously," he complained. "I don't think that you should—"

"Is this a lecture, Tommy? Horrors! I didn't bring my notebook."

"Oh, damn!"

"That's not nice language to use before a lady."

"A *lady* wouldn't make a man so mad. Sometimes I think you just like to devil me, you haven't any heart at all. Just a regular iceberg!" He was plainly in a huff. "I'd like to see you fall for somebody good and hard. Then you'd—"

Hastily she changed the subject. "Listen, Tommy, I told Vivienne I'd help her dress at nine. She's late, had a date with Bill. Care if I run off a minute?" Then she added impulsively: "I'm sorry, Tommy, if you care. I don't think you do—much, but I'm sorry if I ever make you unhappy. Love can be so — awful, if you love enough! I—I know!"

And she was gone, leaving him staring.

Babs went slowly up the stairs, and any one could have seen the tragedy in her eyes. Phillip—always something was making her think of him. After five years, why couldn't she forget, have peace? Would memory always haunt her?

Where was he? What had happened to him? Was her faith in him justified?

Sometimes her brother, knowing that she still cared, had questioned his young judgment, she knew. He'd been so beside himself, he might have been too hasty.

Whatever Phillip's character, Babs knew he had spoiled all other men for her. She had tried to care for Tommy and for others, and couldn't. So far as love was concerned, her life was a hopeless failure. Those halcyon days with Phillip, the tropic moonlight nights were still her only realities.

At first she had thought that Phillip would not forget her. She had prayed and prayed that he wouldn't, that some day they might meet again. But now reason answered that their paths would never cross; even if they did, what good? He would have lost faith in her.

All these things ran through her mind as she went to her room. She found her roommate, her arms above her head, struggling with an American Beauty evening gown.

"Thank heaven! Babs, I need you like a baby needs its mother."

Laughingly they set the dress into place. Then Vivienne announced: "I've decided who's to be my husband."

Babs, laughing, began to powder her nose.

"Oh, I'm serious this time," the pretty blonde declared.

Babs thought: "You've been engaged three times; you're the worst little flirt on the campus. But you're pretty and charming and lovable, in spite of your fickleness."

Aloud she asked: "Who is he? I'll bite."

"A friend of Bill's who is coming to the dance. I knew him last year in New York. He's thrilling. His and mine is going to be a regular Bob-and-Marion affair!"

Babs smiled a tender smile. Her brother was engaged to a lovely red-haired junior, one of the most popular girls in the school. The devotion of the two had become a byword.

"There's Bill's car now. I'm ready, are you, Babs? Hurry!"

AFTER picking up her vanity, Babs followed her roommate to the stairs and looked down upon the gayety below. Above the sound of revelry rose a man's ringing laugh.

Babs gave a little gasp; the vanity fell from her nerveless hands. The laugh was just like Phillip's!

The vanity, clattering down the stairs, drew the attention of Bill and his friends below. They all looked up.

Babs's glance met that of a tall athletic young man whose hair was very blond.

She swayed, caught the banister only in time to keep from falling. It *was* Phillip. He was there, smiling up at her.

"Bill's friend and I used to know each other in Bermuda," she explained to Vivienne.

Phillip took her hand, saying, "Hello, Babba!" as if they had parted only yesterday. She could scarcely answer. A firm and daring chin, a strong mouth that looked as if it often smiled, sea-blue eyes—he was just the same to her.

Bill, Vivienne and Tommy crowded about them, exclaiming, "How exciting, knowing each other in Bermuda!"

"You Wouldn't Fool Me, Would Ya?" The orchestra was beginning a dance number.

"This belongs to me," Phillip told her. How could she be expected to remember that by rights it was Tommy's?

She went into Phillip's arms, arms that had once held her with all the strength and tenderness of love. A warmth crept like fire through her veins. She had thought it was so, and now she knew!

Others might cease to care, love once and love again, but her heart was not like that. In all the world there had always been, and always would be, only Phillip. And he was worthy of her love, she knew that, too, with a sudden changeless conviction.

"How you can dance!" he said engagingly.

"Whatever I am to-day, I owe to you." Babs took her cue and tried to be equally uncaring. "You were my first teacher. Don't tell me you've forgotten how I stepped all over your feet!"

His laughter rang out. Oh, where in all the world was there a laugh like his? To-night she would laugh, too, happily, without a care. Pretending that she was again where seas each night turned silver and once again he adored her.

"I enjoyed having you step on me," he maintained. "Each time you'd say so repentantly, 'Oh, I won't do that again!' And then—bing!—you would! How long has it been since then? Nearly five years?"

"Five years," she affirmed.

"But pretend they're not past," she begged in her thoughts. "We're back in Bermuda. All is as it was on that last night beneath the stars."

"You've changed since then."

Vehemently she protested, "No, I haven't!"

"To-night you're a picture of what the smart co-ed should wear. Then, the little yellow dress you wore the night we went sailing"—he still remembered what she wore!—"suited you better."

"It was rather awful."

"Unsophisticated, yes, but—I liked it. It made you look very, very sweet, Babba." The first hint of tenderness sounded in his voice. The words assailed her with a blind, sweet anguish.

Oh, to know what lay in his heart! Did they matter to him, those days of long ago?

"Who's that scowling on the sidelines who hasn't taken his eyes off you?"

"That's Tommy Elgers, and I must have the next dance with him." She might have added: "He's asked me to marry him a hundred times, but I'd forgotten he still existed."

They fell silent, just dancing. She wondered, as she had countless times in the past, but with no lack of faith in him, why Phillip had been a stowaway? And how did he happen to be here? Had people like Bill always been his friends?

It was enough to be in his arms. She was happier than she had been in all those five long years.

While Phil partnered Vivienne, she had the next dance with Tommy. She remembered Vivienne's words: "I've decided who's to be my husband." She smiled. Vivienne, for once, was out of luck; the next dance Phil would come back to her.

And he did.

It was a waltz, a perfect waltz, with spring voices floating in through the windows. After two rounds, he led her, without asking leave, from the ballroom, picked up her jade green evening wrap, took her down the steps to Bill's roadster.

They drove through the silent night, the wind blowing her brown curls, fanning her hot cheeks. Her eyes above the green, white-furred coat glowed softly as if happiness had lit candles within. Phillip might not love her still, but certainly he liked her.

The car came to a stop beside the lake. Silence and moonlight. His arm crept about her shoulders. A sort of heady sweetness came over her.

"Does he still care? Does he, oh, does he?" her heart cried out.

He gathered her in his arms. "Why won't you look at me, Babba?"

She raised her eyes.

He scarcely breathed, "Do you—remember?"

"Yes, Phillip."

His lips crushed down on hers. He kissed her again and again, quick, hard kisses, while her arms clung about his neck.

"Oh, Babba, Babba!" His voice was all husky. "You haven't changed; you're just as sweet, just as lovely!"

JUST before midnight they drove slowly home. Her face radiant in the moonlight, dark eyes glowing, soft curls tousled, she nestled against his shoulder. She knew that she had been happy in love in Bermuda, but that was nothing compared with now. Suffering had taught her what happiness meant.

He kissed her a dozen times on the porch.

At last, with a thousand songs in her heart, Babs turned from a last good night to her lover.

As Phillips's car vanished some one called, "Babs! Babs!"

It was her twin, Bob.

Without restraint, she poured out her happiness to him, told him everything.

"If he's a friend of Bill's, he's certainly okay," Bob admitted. "But why was he a stowaway, Sis?"

"I forgot to ask him! I was so glad to see him, I never thought to ask," she owned. "I only know he lives in New York. He said I'd like his grumpy patients; he's practicing medicine, I guess. Goodness!" Babs laughed softly. "We didn't even talk about anything so practical as an engagement!"

"Did you explain your leaving Bermuda?"

She shook her head. "I evaded; I was afraid it would make him not like you, Bob. I think he knew I'd always cared, though."

She left her brother and walked on air to her room. She didn't sleep a wink all night. After five years, how could she? How could she after the sun for her had been so long gone out, and now it shone again? After the trees and flowers had been dead, and now suddenly they had sprung into blossom?

She expected to hear from Phillip in the morning, but no word came.

"He's gone out with Bill," Vivienne announced casually.

At first, Babs was a little hurt that her roommate should know more than she. Later she reasoned, "Phil forgot to tell me his plans for to-day. We had other things to talk about." No hint came to her of what she was to learn about him later.

The morning and afternoon dragged endlessly. She couldn't settle down to anything. Already last night seemed months ago; she must die if she did not see Phil soon. She longed for him. "Hurry, hurry back!" her impatient heart clamored all day.

After dinner Vivienne came rushing in. Her beautiful blue eyes were bright with excitement, as they always were after meeting an engaging new man or making a new conquest.

"Well, I did it!" she cried. "Will you be my maid-of-honor this spring?"

Babs turned from the dresser. In a little rose chiffon gown, with her baby-clear complexion, delicate features, soft brown curls, she had never looked more lovely.

"I should never have doubted your love! Can you ever forgive me?"

Laughingly she inquired, "What's the color scheme for the wedding? And, less important, who's the man?"

"Bill's friend, of course," her roommate announced triumphantly. "Oh, I was nutty about him when I met him last year. I had lunch with him to-day, and—and I found he feels the same way toward me as I do toward him!"

With a choking cry, Babs rushed from the room. It couldn't be true, it couldn't be! Only last night Phil had said he loved her. Surely he meant that they were engaged again. Attractive as Vivienne was, she couldn't, in just one day, have bewitched Phillip.

Babs remembered what a little flirt her roommate was. "Vivienne's just talking, taking seriously something said in fun," she decided. Of course, that was it.

As she reached the porch she saw a tall figure waiting. Phillip, thank heaven! Now at once she would ask him. She did.

But he said, in a hard voice, "That's what I came to tell you. I presume you'll be able to forget; that won't be very hard for you."

Faintness stole over Babs.

"This morning I found—" he went on.

But she was gone, hurt unto death, fleeing like one mortally wounded.

SHE mounted the stairs, took her traveling bag from the closet shelf and began packing. She couldn't keep on living with Vivienne. She was through with school, with everything!

She gathered up her belongings. Her bag packed, she staggered down the stairs.

Bob, waiting in the parlor for Marion, spied his sister.

"Where you going?" he called. "Babs! What's the matter?" Alarmed, he followed her to the dimly lit porch.

Her words were almost unintelligible. "Phillip's—he's thrown me—me over—he's engaged to Vivienne, and I—I'm going away—New York."

"Babs, you're crazy! How can you run off two months before graduation?"

Babs turned on him, her eyes hot with anger. "Don't you try to stop me! Tell me what to do! I did what you asked once. And that's why I lost Phillip. It's all your fault. You robbed me of him." She tried to wrench her bag from his hands.

He would not give it up.

"Let go! Let go, I say!" And when she saw he would not, "Oh, I hate you! I hate you!" Half crazy in her grief, "I don't care if you are my brother. I hate you! I wish I'd never set eyes on you. I wish to God you'd never been born! Let go! Let go, I say! Give that to me!"

"Listen, Sis, I'll go tell Phillip it was all my fault, because I loved you too well. I'll go on my knees in apology. I'll make him give up Vivienne and marry you if it takes me all the rest of my life."

"No, you can't force any one to love you if he—he doesn't!"

The front door slammed, then hurrying feet approached.

"It's Phillip," Bob cried agitatedly. "He's heard us. Perhaps he's come to tell you he still loves you." He fled.

No, Phillip wasn't going to tell her that he loved her. She wouldn't be fooled again. He'd ask her about an engagement present for Vivienne, something like that. If he did, she wouldn't flinch. She was hardened now; she could bear anything.

She thought that she could, but she found that she couldn't, for the next moment Phillip had caught her in his arms, was kissing her—hard. As if he meant it, as if he'd never been engaged to any one but her!

"I've been a brute. I knew it soon as I heard you crying out here. And when I heard your words to Bob, I was half wild. I never should have doubted your love."

"Why did you?"

"At breakfast this morning Bill wanted to know where I'd run off with you last night. He said your fiancé had had ten fits."

"But I'm not engaged to Tommy! I'd have told you if—"

"That's what I thought, but I was worried. Then Vivienne, evidently thinking I should see her for old time's sake, telephoned, suggested lunch together. I was just hot and bothered enough to agree. I thought because she's your roommate she'd know all about you and Tommy. She acted surprised that I didn't know you were engaged."

"I've told her a dozen times I'm not. It's Tommy who—"

"I suppose even then I might have had faith in you if I hadn't remembered how you'd left me in Bermuda. A man doesn't like to be made a fool of twice. And, Lord, I was hurt, because I'd even asked about the man when we were dancing. It came to me you weren't the girl I'd thought you were; that girl was just a dream of mine.

"Vivienne went out of her way to be charming and—well, you know how she can get away with murder. She wanted to know if I'd mind her being engaged to me, not permanently, but temporarily, she said. A fiancé came in so handy, and she'd never been engaged to a blond! Some devil within drove me to consent. I thought I'd protect myself against you, and—I might as well admit it—I wanted to hurt you, too. Oh, it sounds selfish and—and it was schoolboyish and rotten of me! Darling, can you ever forgive me? I don't know how I could have done it!"

"I'm not sure that I'll forgive you," she replied, in the happiest voice in all the world, "but I'll think the matter over and tell you later!"

She melted into his arms.

Bob, eavesdropping on the porch, heard an unintelligible murmur of "Only Girl — Babba — Pansy Eyes," and other such nonsense.

With a satisfied grin, Bob went into the house and asked for Marion.

THEY had come in from outdoors, and were comfortable against the pillows of the parlor lounge.

"Get ready for a surprise!" Phillip ordered, smiling down at her adored little face. He drew from his pocket a ring. It was set with a square-cut ruby, crimson as a drop of blood!

She could hardly talk in her amazement at sight of it.

"I—I lost it before I even met you!" she exclaimed. "It nearly broke my heart; it was my mother's. I'm so happy to have it again! Who ever gave it to you?"

"Tell me first," he asked, "about yourself in New York, won't you, dear?"

"Of course. I don't even think of it very often because of—of unhappy memories, but I'd like you to know—everything. You see, Phillip, we lost our parents and went to live with an uncle who was made our guardian. He was hard and cruel, not at all like our father. We were both afraid of him, I more than Bob, and Bob was always trying to protect me. My uncle's wife was good to me, too, so kind. It was because of her we stayed as long as we did. We called my uncle 'Ogre.' That's what he was to us.

"When we were about fourteen, Ogre went on a rum-runner. He tried to make Bob go, too, but Aunt Helen stuck up for us, threatened to tell the police if Bob got mixed up in such a thing. After Ogre got to selling liquor, things were terrible when he was home.

Oh, it was dreadful. And when he was drunk he tried to make me deliver orders.

"Bob was furious. He found an old deserted house, helped himself to the upstairs. When Ogre was home and on a rampage, we'd stay in this place he found."

"Did your uncle ever hurt you?" Phillip's eyes looked hard and stern.

"Lots of times he struck me, but not when Bob was around. I think he'd have killed my uncle if he had known. I wouldn't tell, I didn't want trouble. Then one night Ogre threw me clear across the room; my shoulder came out of joint. Bob, half crazy, took me to our garret house and got a doctor."

"Some one he knew?"

"No, he didn't know of any, but he'd passed an apartment and noticed a doctor's name and he remembered. I was too hurt, too frightened to notice, but Bob said the man acted suspicious, asked questions, and might give us away. The next morning we moved all the boxes and furniture into the basement, because Bob was afraid the doctor would come back."

"Your brother was right. The doctor did go back."

"Why, Phillip, how do you know?"

He took her two small hands while he answered tenderly, "Because I was the doctor, Babs."

"Phillip!" she gave a little gasp.

"You, Babba, were my first patient —lovely, tender, game. In five minutes I knew that the sweetest thing in life would be having you. I couldn't understand the mystery of your living as you did, but I vowed that, whatever it might be, I'd win you. I noticed that costly ruby on your finger, Babba," and he smiled a little whimsical smile. "I thought you might be thieves in hiding, and that was part of the loot!"

"Oh, Phillip!"

"I went back the next afternoon, to find you flown; nothing left but the ring. How bitterly disappointed I was! But I vowed I'd find you. I'd noticed a sailor's cap, Bob's, I suppose. I watched the docks, traced you to the White Gander and overheard you and Bob talking.

"In no time at all I flew back home and arranged for some one to look after any future patients. Then I got into an old torn suit of the janitor's and stowed away on the ship. I thought sure they'd send me back when I was discovered so soon. I was all upset and just made up the first story that popped into my head. The police were after me, I said. I think some of the crew always believed that, though later, having his word not to tell, I told the captain the truth—that I was following the Only Girl to the tropics!"

His eyes were warm as he looked at her. "It wasn't chance that brought me here, either. I never gave up searching for you, always hoping I'd find you, that something I couldn't understand had taken you from me in Bermuda. The picture of you as a pretty co-ed in the *Times* gave me my clew. Something in your face told me you still might be true to your first love. I wrote Bill, whom I knew was here, and came at once to you. It's not every woman, is it, Babba sweet, who gets loved like that?"

She saw in his eyes something beautiful, something she couldn't describe, but something that made her lay her head suddenly against his breast, one arm about his neck, offering a silent prayer:

"Dear God, thank you for our great love. And make me sweet as Phillip thinks I am."

Then she met his lips.

Unconscious of watching eyes, she reached into the safe

The Marriage Trap

"You have got my brother into this," Stephen Somers told Dulcie, "and now you must get him out. You must pretend to be his wife!"

By Madeleine Sharps Buchanan

MOST girls in Dulcie's position would have been frightened. But although the passing of the fashionable modiste who had employed Dulcie for the past five years had thrown her, with all the other girls, out of a good paying position, and although she had just ten dollars in her purse, she was anything but frightened or wretched.

Upon passing the oval mirror in Mrs. MacGillicuddy's entrance hall, she had noted that even if Mme. de Vrei had at last died, her beauty was certainly left her. She did not look back on the days when, sure of madame's approaching demise, she had sought tirelessly for another job. Jobs were scarce just then, and people were too busy to note Dulcie's beauty.

A breath of boiling dinner smote her like a slap in the face. Through the door before her Dulcie glimpsed the dining room with its long, narrow table, its islands of catsup bottles and peppers and salts breaking the slightly muddy sea of cloth.

Under Dulcie's arm as she climbed the stairs there was cuddled a gayly bound magazine. It was a magazine of romance.

She would read it after she had eaten the sandwiches she had brought up to her room. It might buck up her spirits a bit.

As she dwelt upon that, for a moment her wide dark eyes draped the iron supports of the elevated with roses, and rousing herself sharply, she stepped to the mirror in the golden oak bureau. She turned her pretty head this way and that, and noted her feathery golden hair, her heavily fringed eyes, the lovely line of lips and throat.

Seated on the sagging bed, munching her sandwich, Dulcie read the gay magazine, read it desperately, draining from it every bit of brightness, every shred of romance, every hint of courage it contained. She read of girls across whose path romance had flashed like a passing comet. The fortunate ones were those who had the sense and the courage to grasp it.

"Romance and opportunity," said one story, "come to every one. Love and success would crown every life if people had the brains and the nerve to recognize the two. Many people have not the brains or the nerve."

"I wonder how much truth there really is in that!" mused Dulcie, staring out the window.

Dulcie sat there reading her magazine, feeling brighter, somehow, until Mrs. MacGillicuddy came to ask her could she give her a little of her room rent. After she had gone Dulcie had only five dollars left.

"To-morrow," she vowed as she got into her silken nightdress, "I am going to be one of these geniuses who make their own opportunity and construct their own romance. I'm down to almost nothing, without the prospect of a job."

SEARCHING rays of sunshine wakened Dulcie the next morning, revealing pitilessly the cheap sordidness of the little room and the rare loveliness of the girl in the sagging bed. The environment, too, did not fit with Dulcie's silken things flung recklessly about.

Putting all her possessions into a big suitcase, Dulcie set it far back in her closet. Then she dressed in a jade green slip of a gown that was like a sheaf inclosing a white lily. Crushing a sand colored hat down upon her feathery curls, she let herself out into the narrow hall.

The crisp morning air was welcome when she emerged into the street and, deliciously aware of her beauty, Dulcie walked until she found the bus she sought.

For romance and her chance she had decided she would look in the country, the suburbs to which the wealthy fled from too close contact with the mobs.

At the end of the bus line she got out and took another bus. When that one went no farther, she got out and walked.

She was in a land of lawns and fountains, of gateways and chauffeurs, of nurse maids and unlimited incomes. Any one passing the strolling Dulcie would have felt sure she belonged behind one of those gateways.

Noon found her well into the coun-

try, the influence of the gay magazine wearing off, and her appetite going strong. She could afford lunch that day, but how about others to come? What wild impulse had brought her out of the city when she so badly needed a job?

Feeling very blue, Dulcie went into a tea house and bought herself a sandwich and a glass of iced tea. With the final sip of tea she seemed to swallow a little feeling of desperation that remained with her until she was once more on the street. What was she to do?

The afternoon sunshine lay in warm bars across the concrete road that presently Dulcie found herself sauntering upon. No house was in sight. She must go back to the city. To-morrow the endless round of offices again. Dulcie wondered suddenly if it was worth while—if she would not be more sensible just to jump in some river and end it all then and there?

And at that moment, across a bridge, around a corner, she came upon the cream-colored roadster, on its side, wheels in the air.

Dulcie approached it carefully, her heart pounding, and her cheeks very white, for no young woman in her position could afford to pass by an expensive wreck like that.

From the side of the car, the legs they belonged to entirely hidden, stuck a pair of decidedly handsome shoes! There was a man under the car. And he was very likely dead.

Panic laid hold of Dulcie. The thing to do was to run. Perhaps at the first house she came to she might—or if a car came along—

And then something brought her sharply to a halt. The something was the memory of the gay magazine left on the sagging bed in the MacGillicuddy house. "Love and success," the magazine had said, "would crown every life if people had the brains and the nerve to recognize the two."

Going close to the machine, Dulcie knelt and peered under it. What met her gaze was a glimpse of good-looking legs in gray knickers, and one limp but aristocratic hand.

Shivering, Dulcie laid her finger on the pulse and started to find that it beat faintly.

She must get him out of there. It would be too far to go for help the way she had come, and of what lay ahead she knew nothing. Yet it was impossible for her to pry that man out of the expensive wreckage he was buried in. At any moment he might die.

SHE was about to rise, uncertain what to do, when an exclamation behind her so startled her that she sank in a wavering heap on the ground beside the car.

A man stood over her, and a short distance away a touring car was parked.

"What's happened?" he asked. "Looks like a bad wreck. Anybody hurt, miss?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Dulcie breathlessly. "I am afraid he is dead! I can't make him hear me and he won't move."

The man stooped and inspected the shoes and then rose and mopped his brow.

"Now, miss, you take it calm," he advised. "I've seen some queer wrecks in my day, and often when you think a chap is dead he ain't nowhere near it. How come you got clear when the wreck happened?"

Dulcie opened her lips—but in time she remembered the magazine.

"I don't know. It was all so sudden."

"Humph!" grunted the man. "Well, it will take somebody else to help me get this poor chap clear. I gotta get help. Will you stay here or shall I take you to the nearest farmhouse?"

"Oh, I couldn't stay here!" cried Dulcie.

Without another word the man put Dulcie into his car and started along the road in the direction in which Dulcie had been sauntering. Only now it was another road, the road to a chance, perhaps to a new job that might hold a future!

"I guess you are a bit shook up yourself," hazarded the man, staring at Dulcie curiously. "If you could tell me something, however, it would be luck for me. I'm a reporter on the Worthville *Daily*. Just tell me your name and the name of that poor chap, and—"

Dulcie shrank from him. "Oh, I couldn't!" she gasped.

"Rather not?" The man looked disgusted. "Well, I'll get it anyhow. There ain't a thing disgraceful about being in a wreck."

But Dulcie sat with her lips pressed firmly together until the nearest farmhouse was reached. There, in the kitchen, waited upon and consoled by the sympathetic wife of the farmer who, with his son, went to the scene of the wreck with the reporter, she was honestly scared.

If the man had died—if he had not died— Her mind traveled in circles.

She had permitted the reporter to think she had been with him in the wrecked car. She had seized this opportunity when it crossed her path, instead of walking sensibly down the road.

By the time the reporter returned she had unbent far enough to the friendly farm woman as to tell her her name, and when the kitchen door opened her agitation could not have been more convincing if she had really been in the car with the man.

"Good news, miss," announced the reporter. "He is not dead. He's in a bad way, but we're getting him to the hospital right off. He don't know a darn thing. Come along if you want to. I know now why you wouldn't tell me his name, and mighty clever of you, too. But I knew his face all right, and his papers and license card confirmed my guess. This here chap is young Somers, running for district attorney! No wonder this young woman kept quiet about his identity! The other side is trying to get all they can on him. But I'm blamed if I can see what there is in this motor accident with a sweet young girl like you to be ashamed of!"

Somers! The district attorney! And she had said boldly that she had been out with him!

Dulcie seemed to see prison walls looming up before her. Why, she might as well have stolen something from a cop!

But the keen desire to see it out won the mastery.

"Why, of course I shall go to the hospital," said Dulcie quietly. "I must know whether or not he will live."

The reporter grinned at her.

"You're a cute one, miss," he said, and refused to be abashed by Dulcie's flashing eyes.

WHITE tiled halls, ether-charged silence. Rubber soled shoes and the mysterious soundless flitting of snowy figures. Doors that closed without a creak,

voices that never lifted beyond the one soft tone, and over all the appalling sense of the nearness of pain and death, tragedy and trial, the dominating note of efficiency.

Into this came pretty Dulcie, with her shameless secret, her daring bluff, her bold little lie. She was given a room next to that in which they placed young Somers, and she sat down at the window and stared out at the yard where a few white-clad nurses strolled about.

She had molded a gigantic farce. She had let them believe she had been motoring with Duane Somers, the next district attorney! She had certainly aimed high enough. If she had sufficient nerve to see it through she might land a splendid job through him.

At six o'clock a soft-voiced nurse brought her a tray of delicious dinner. Dulcie eyed it eagerly.

"We have good news for you," the nurse told her. "The doctors say that Mr. Somers will live. It would be simply dreadful if he didn't, with the future he has! He has a big fight on. But a compound fracture of the—"

Dulcie did not hear the learned words. She was frightened. She had taken life by the throat and challenged it, and now it had dared her in return! She had let them think she had been motoring with this man, and now they said he would live!

"He cannot see me?" asked Dulcie.

"Oh, gracious, no!" The nurse looked horrified. "We have sent for his brother, and you may stay here, if you like, until he is able to speak to you. You must be feeling very miserable yourself."

"I could not bear to go away!" said Dulcie.

"Could you tell us how it happened?" asked the nurse gently. "Of course you will be besieged with reporters. You know Mr. Somers has kept away from ladies ever since he decided to run."

Dulcie's hands flew to her eyes and she sought to hide her panic.

"Oh, don't ask me!" she begged. "And I couldn't see any one."

"Well, you won't have to," soothed the nurse. "But you know what it means to be in a smash with any one as prominent as Duane Somers!"

Left alone, Dulcie experienced a wild desire to run. Desperation looked out of the eyes with which Dulcie stared from the window at the hospital yard. What was she to do? Less than five dollars in her purse and no one to help her earn any more. She felt cold—panic-stricken, and a sort of sullen fear made her decide to see this thing through, whatever the end.

WITH the breakfast tray the little nurse brought Dulcie the morning paper.

"Oh, why didn't you tell me?" she asked reproachfully. "We are all so thrilled! Just look at this, Miss Edgecomb!"

Putting out a shaky hand, Dulcie took the paper. Black type leaped at her and several awful words took shape.

DUANE SOMERS, CANDIDATE FOR DISTRICT ATTORNEY, IN MOTOR ACCIDENT WITH DULCIE EDGECOMB, HIS FIANCEE!—BOTH YOUNG PEOPLE IN A SMALL HOSPITAL AT WORTHVILLE, NEAR SCENE OF WRECK!—SOMERS, WHO HAD KEPT HIS ENGAGEMENT A SECRET UNTIL AFTER THE CAMPAIGN, IS IN A SERIOUS CONDITION, BUT PHYSICIANS SAY HE WILL RECOVER.

Dulcie could read no more. Sheer horror gripped her by the throat. She sprang to her feet.

"Who did this dreadful thing?" she cried, waving the paper at the astounded nurse. "Who dared to print this?"

"Why, gracious, I don't know!" gasped the nurse. "Now, do be calm! You might have known somebody would get hold of that! There are three reporters downstairs now to see you, and any amount of political men! We are going to have our hands full."

"But I am not engaged to Mr. Somers!" cried Dulcie frantically. "It is not true!"

The nurse did not believe her, and, as Dulcie met her incredulous eyes she knew it was all the work of that reporter on the Worthville *Daily*.

"I wouldn't deny it now if I were you," said the nurse gently. "You see, it has all come out. It can't do you any harm. All the world loves a love affair."

The nurse left her, and Dulcie sat staring blankly at the paper. It would certainly hurt Duane Somers—if his enemies wanted to use it—if she told the truth and got it believed by some and doubted by others! If she told that she had not known him at all! But it was one thing to wait until Duane Somers recovered so that he might give her a job, or, perhaps, just a card to some one who might, and quite another to sit by placidly and let the world think her the young politician's fiancée! Dulcie was not accustomed to telling or acting lies. But now she could see no way out of this one.

Toward noon the little nurse returned.

"We are fairly crazy with reporters and the men who insist on seeing either you or Mr. Somers!" She wrung her hands. "But his brother has just arrived, and he looks the sort who can handle anything. He reminds me of our head surgeon. He is just that snappy, alert, quick type, and he looks like a walking love affair! You should have seen him, Miss Edgecomb, questioning Dr. Jamison about you, leaning against the wall with his arms folded and his eyes just little narrowed slits under his drawn brows! I should be petrified of him. But here I am telling you all this, and of course you know him well!"

"But I don't know him at all," said poor Dulcie, feeling sick and faint.

"Well, he wasn't at all surprised about you, at any rate," said the nurse with a nod. "You won't be able to keep this up. It won't hurt Mr. Somers for the public to know he is engaged to a nice girl."

But the scandal of it would hurt him if the public knew he was *not* engaged to the nice girl! The enemies of a man in Duane Somers's position would make much of that until it took on the proportions of an ugly affair. Dulcie visioned the helpless figure in the next room and her eyes filled. Oh, how could she have done this wild thing?

"And now you'll see it through, you little idiot!" she told herself bitterly.

"MR. STEPHEN SOMERS is coming in," said the little nurse softly. "He said he was anxious to talk with you."

And then the white-clad figure was gone, and in its place Dulcie saw a dark brown well cut business suit, a tall broad form, and two keen eyes regarding her.

"Miss Edgecomb, I am Stephen Somers, Duane's brother," said a pleasant cultured voice. "I have just seen the morning papers, and naturally I am anxious for a chat with you."

Dulcie met his appraising gaze with her two flashing eyes.

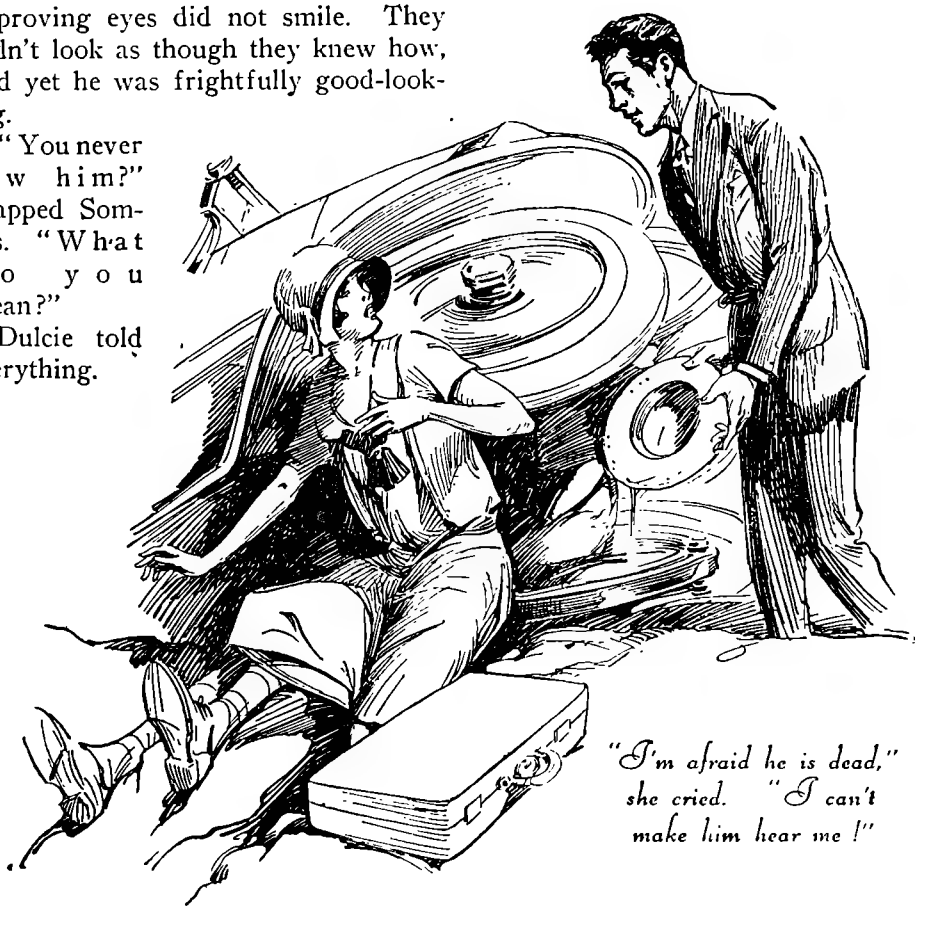
"Mr. Somers, I am not engaged to

your brother," she said curtly. "I never saw him before. In fact, I—I've never seen him yet, only his feet and—and one of his hands."

She sounded idiotic. The keen, disapproving eyes did not smile. They didn't look as though they knew how, and yet he was frightfully good-looking.

"You never saw him?" snapped Somers. "What do you mean?"

Dulcie told everything.



"I'm afraid he is dead," she cried. "I can't make him hear me!"

"You expect me to believe this?" snapped Stephen Somers.

"Goodness, no!" sighed Dulcie. "I don't expect anybody to believe anything. That is why I took a chance at life myself. The next district attorney should be able to get me some sort of a job if he is young and has a sense of humor and anything human about him. Of course if he is—"

"If he is anything like me you have little hope," said Somers grimly. "Is that what you had in mind? I admit this is a hard world. But you must admit that your story is a bit fantastic."

"It would be more fantastic if I insisted that the story in the paper was true and asked you for a big sum of money to get rid of me before your brother regains consciousness!" said Dulcie quickly. "I've told you the truth. I am in a desperate position, and there is no one to help me but myself. My one big desire at present is to get a job!"

"You do not understand me," said Somers quietly. "The last thing in the world I wish you to do is deny that newspaper story! In fact, you must see those reporters and admit it! So

far as the world knows, you are now the promised wife of Duane Somers."

"I am—*what?*" gasped Dulcie.

Her delicate face flushed as though a red lamp had been lighted behind the alabaster skin.

"You are his fiancée," said Somers firmly. "And that you shall remain until he is the district attorney! You can't get out of it now. We cannot afford to have a scandal at this stage, or anything like it. We have been only too careful all along. The mere fact of Duane motoring in the country with some girl no one ever heard of, and who is *not* his fiancée, would be enough to ruin his chances. It—"

"But I was not motoring with him!" said Dulcie. "I am willing to tell the truth to any one!"

"Don't you see what that would do?" asked Somers. "It might ruin my brother's chances. The papers say you are his fiancée, and that you will remain until—"

Dulcie quivered with rage.

"And when he has won his office I fancy I shall be publicly jilted, set aside!" she flared.

"Not at all," said Somers courteously. "I can promise you that then you shall have a paying position. I shall see to that myself."

Dulcie approached him with little fists clenched and lips that trembled in scarlet rage against her white face.

"You are not engaging a maid or a chauffeur!" she cried. "And you have no right to insult me! If you force me to play this game I warn you here and now that I shall probably marry your brother! I shall have a job by the time he wins that office that you are not counting upon. I shall be his wife!"

"I think not," said Somers evenly. "Duane does not care for women."

"He will care for this one!" said Dulcie, and gave all her feathery little curls a shake.

"Come now, play the game," Stephen told Dulcie. "You will find that Duane will fall into line when he is able to comprehend. He has worked hard for this job, and the opposition has not been able to get a thing on him. Don't you see what you will do to him if you do not play the game?"

Dulcie looked into Stephen Somers's eyes for a space of time as brief as a wild bird's call. But in that moment she felt that she hated him, and that she would live only to best him somehow.

"You wish me to lie to these reporters, to the world?" she asked scornfully. "Then, having served your purpose, I am to accept some job that you see fit to offer me?"

"It will be a position with a future, and one which you will like," said the young man gravely. "Think it over. I'll return in half an hour. I feel sure I can rely utterly on your gameness, Miss Edgecomb."

And the door closed gently in Dulcie's angry face.

A WRETCHED thirty minutes followed, during which she paced about the little room, biting her lips, stamping her little suède clad feet. She had rarely been so angry.

Should she stay and make this Duane fall madly in love with her, or should she go? If she went she would worry Stephen greatly, and would probably cause a lot of talk that would hurt Duane irreparably. She did not wish to do that, for Dulcie had a tender heart. She would play any game squarely. She was like that.

Helpless in the next room, suffering,

a brilliant career before him, Duane Somers woke her pity. She had started this thing. She was responsible. No matter how rudely this handsome Stephen treated her, she could not step out and leave Duane in the muddle that had been caused by her.

But after all it was the soft-voiced nurse, her soul filled with romance, who settled the matter for Dulcie.

Poking her white-capped head around the door, she whispered:

"Would you like to come and peep at poor Mr. Somers? He is not conscious, but we are encouraged about him. I can take you in now."

A moment later Dulcie was looking down at a blond head on a rumpled pillow, a frank, likable face, twisted with pain. And with a gasp she made her decision. Come what might she would stand by, at least for the present. He must tell her himself what to do. She would take no further orders from that handsome, arrogant brother of his!

Outside the door of Somers's room she ran into a group of eager reporters who had somehow worked their way that far.

Seizing her arm, they questioned her excitedly.

"Miss Edgecomb? Could we have a few minutes? Will you give us your story of this?"

Dulcie put up her hands defensively, but her eyes smiled at the earnest boyish faces.

"I have nothing to tell you," she stammered. "You've said it all. Mr. Somers is better. They have every hope for him."

"When are you going to be married?" asked one chap, his pencil poised, and his eyes devouring Dulcie's beauty.

"I don't know," smiled Dulcie.

"How did the accident happen?" snapped another.

"I don't know. It was so quick."

"Steering gear," said a third young man with a frown. "You are engaged to Duane Somers, are you not?"

Dulcie lifted her flowerlike head in desperation and encountered the direct gaze of Stephen as he came toward them.

"Yes," said Dulcie defiantly, and was enraged at the smile that Stephen gave her. She was thinking of the other brother, lying white and helpless inside the door near by.

Stephen followed Dulcie into her room and closed the door.

He was looking at her seriously enough then.

"Thank you," he said gravely. "You have made a wise decision. Duane will be no end grateful to you. And when we move Duane you had best come along. We have a housekeeper who has been a mother to us for years, and you will be amply chaperoned. All that you do will be noted. Brill, the chap who is doing his best to ruin Duane and put Skelton, our rival, in office, will make something out of this if he can. You have no idea how clever they are."

Dulcie gave a gasp of dismay. "Must I go to your house?"

Stephen bowed.

"If you will give me the address of your boarding place I will see that your room rent is paid and your belongings brought to our home. Don't wither me with a look like that! You may pay me back out of the salary you will earn in the job I have promised you when Duane gets into office. I will advance you some money, and you need have no scruples about taking it."

Dulcie said nothing. After all, this was what she had asked of life that

lovely day when she walked down the country road and found the cream-colored roadster on its side.

THE Somers house was a solid, rather depressing mansion, with heavy chimneys, deep windows, and white marble pillars.

To pretty Dulcie it looked like a prison. She came to it under conditions that galled and tore her sensitive nerves.

The magnificent crystal chandeliers in the great rooms that opened off the broad hallways glimmered at her with a kind of malevolence. The luxury about her filled Dulcie with fear. She had dared enter here because she had grabbed her chance, because she had not walked past that roadster and left the man beneath it to his fate. But what was to be the end of it all?

Stephen flung up the shades and let in the warm sunshine.

"Now, Miss Edgecomb," he said, "I have here a card which I shall give you when Duane has either won or lost his fight. It will tell you where to get that job you asked for. I am putting the card in my safe over here until your part of the bargain has been carried out. I need not say that this is a position that will never be offered you again. It has a splendid future and a good salary goes with it."

If Dulcie could have snatched the card from him and run away she would have done so.

"How do you know that I can fill this position?" she asked.

"It is a secretaryship," he replied frankly. "You will have time and assistance to fit yourself for it. My friend understands this situation, and thinks you are a good sport. He will not make the work hard for you."

Dulcie flushed.

"I know what you think of me," she told Stephen quietly. "You have thought it from the first. That is, that I deliberately set out to involve the next district attorney in some sort of an affair, and that I hoped to make you pay me money! You think I knew your brother. How dare you think that? And how could you bring me to your home?"

Somers bowed, and his mouth took on a quizzical line.

"What matter what I think?" he asked. "I brought you here because it was the only thing to do. Nothing shall stand in the way of my brother's election!"

"How do you know that I won't hold your brother and yourself to this, and force him to marry me?" Dulcie lifted her lovely head very high, her face hot with defiance.

"How anxious you are that I should think you just what you are not!" smiled Stephen. "I know that you would not do that, Dulcie. Though you may not believe it, I have faith in you."

THE next afternoon Dulcie was taken in by Aunt Phine, the housekeeper, to see Duane Somers for the first time.

The important young man was propped up against snowy pillows, looking white and worn.

He greeted Dulcie with a smile.

"Greetings, my accidental fiancée!" he said, his eyes going admiringly over Dulcie's trim figure, for the arrival of her suitcase from Mrs. MacGillicuddy's had enabled her to don a little blue gown which became her exquisitely.

"Steve has told me your story," he went on. "I think you are a jolly good sport."

Dulcie sat down close by the bed

while Aunt Phine rocked with her knitting beside a window.

"You wish me to stay here?" she asked.

Duane's eyes were caressing her in a way she did not like.

"I do," he said eagerly, and there was an undercurrent of steel in his voice. "Now go on. I want the story from your lips."

And Dulcie told again the silly little story, beginning with the gayly colored magazine.

"Funniest thing I ever heard!" laughed Duane when she finished. "Talk about romance! If my enemies ever got onto this they'd have a great time with it. And you'll stand by now, Dulcie, won't you?"

"I'll stand by because of my own future," said Dulcie with her head held very high. "I was desperate and reckless. I guess you don't know what that means."

"You must not mind old Steve," said Duane, sinking back on his pillows. "He is so successful himself that he rides rough shod over everybody. And he doesn't like girls."

"That's funny," said Dulcie with a sweetly sharp little laugh. "That's what he told me about you."

Duane stared.

"Why, I've always had oodles of friends! Of course since I've been running for this office, I've had to give up parties and all my good times. But you stand by, Dulcie, and we'll all come out on top."

In her own room a few minutes later Dulcie looked at herself for a long time in the glass. She did not like or trust Duane Somers, and she was filled with misgivings.

After that she saw little of Stephen, and when they did meet they said scarcely anything to each other. As Duane improved there were many men calling at the house, and Stephen arranged conferences and informal dinners.

Dulcie watched the calendar, checking off every day that stood between that one and election. And now and then she wandered down and stared at the safe that held the secret of her future job, that big job she was paying so highly for!

The climax came one night when Duane had fully recovered from his accident.

There were to be a few men to dinner, and Aunt Phine and Dulcie were to join them at table, which was a rare occurrence, and a distasteful one to the girl. She had grown bitterly to loathe the position she had been forced into; and she had her doubts about Stephen being able to manage Duane when the time came for their farce of an engagement to be broken.

From the first Dulcie had known that Duane Somers would never let her go.

She possessed one little evening gown, a filmy thing of flame and cream, jagged floating ends of vivid scarlet and billows of foaming lace. The long, lovely line of her throat and neck and her little golden feathery head rose from this web of a gown like something painted in a moment of rare inspiration.

To Duane Somers as he encountered this vision in the dusk of the upper hall she was like that. And she was his, for the moment, no matter how falsely she was his!

"Dulcie!" he said thickly, and put out his arms and swept her to him. "You raving little beauty! Not if I win ten thousand elections shall you ever get away from me! Say that you love me, that you will marry me! We

will marry soon, darling! Now—tonight! The public will love the romance of that! Kiss me, Dulcie! I love you!"

TWISTING in his arms, Dulcie was not able to avoid his lips. They closed down on hers for one blinding moment of rage. Then, a hand against his throat, crushing his evening tie, she broke from him, a crimson virago in a scarlet gown, her dark eyes a blaze of fire.

"I knew from the first that you would not play fair!" she cried. "Oh, you cad! You hateful—"

"Now listen, sweet," an infuriating amusement trailed through the man's placating voice as he straightened his tie. "Don't try to tell me you won't marry me! I've seen through your plot from the first, you little darling! But I don't care. I love you madly. You must marry me, Dulcie. You shall never get away from me! How did you think I could ever let you go?"

"You think — you think that!" gasped Dulcie, anger choking her. "I might have known! You, too!"

Without waiting for his reply she darted past him and down the stairs, running headlong into the dimly lighted library. There were voices across the hall, and old Michael was opening the door. The guests were arriving.

A movement in the far corner of the library startled her, and she shrank back against the curtains as Stephen Somers, some papers in his hands, passed her and crossed the hall to the drawing-room. She was alone.

But the dim lights of the chandeliers were showing her something. That screen set aside. The door of the safe was ajar!

Creeping across the wide room, her anger still shaking her, her eyes still afire, Dulcie approached the safe. Kneeling before it, she flung a glance over her shoulder, put in her hand and took out the card Stephen had placed there the day she came, the card that was to lead her to that wonderful position!

Thrusting it into her bosom she hurried to the door, but in the hall she encountered a tall man in a handsome overcoat, his hat crushed beneath his arm.

The man was Brill, one of the strongest factors in the opposing party. Dulcie had met him once before. She hated his little dark mustache, his highly colored face, his smirk, his exquisite grooming.

What was he doing here?

"Ah, the fiancée!" he greeted her. "And how soon may we look for the wedding bells?"

Dulcie did not reply, but brushed past him hurriedly. Brill had not, of course, been invited to dinner. She did not care why he had come.

In her own room she looked eagerly at the card, her hands trembling a little. It was a shabby trick she had played, but what difference with such men as these? They thought her an adventuress. Duane would not play fair. He had, by his action, released her from all duty toward them.

Dulcie's lip curled as she read the card.

"The Sterling Steel Corporation, 406-408 Blank Building."

Down in the corner of the card Stephen had written in ink, "For the president."

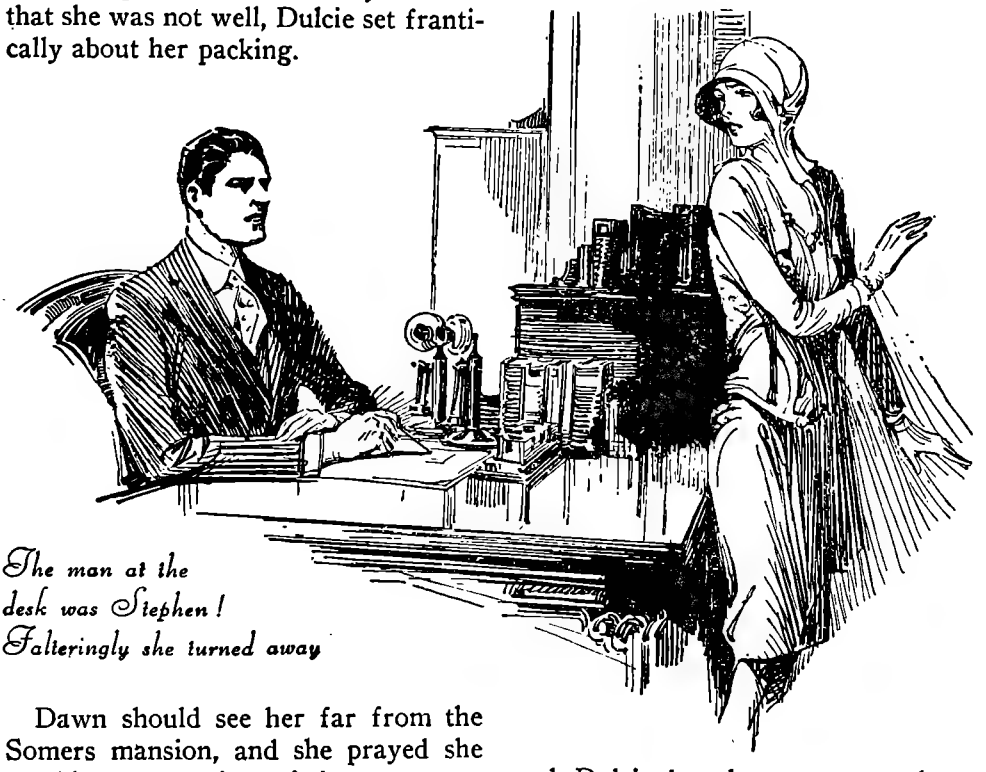
She fancied a note was to go with the card, or perhaps he had meant to take her himself. But he had said his friend knew the story and thought her a good sport.

She would go to this man in the

morning. He would hardly turn her away when he knew.

There was no danger of not reaching the president of this imposing-sounding corporation, for one of Stephen's own cards was clipped to the back of the card of the steel corporation.

Sending word downstairs by Michael that she was not well, Dulcie set frantically about her packing.



The man at the desk was Stephen! Falteringly she turned away

Dawn should see her far from the Somers mansion, and she prayed she would never see it again!

Now and then she rubbed her hand across her lips where Duane had kissed her, but she could not wipe his voice from her ears.

STARTING at every sound, fearful lest Stephen in closing the safe had noted the absence of the card and would watch her, Dulcie saw the morning painting her windows a dull gray, saw the gray flushed with pink, watched the bars of sunshine creeping over her rug and sprang from bed.

A half hour later she was out of the house and walking rapidly down the avenue, her suitcase in her hand, her heart pounding in a sickening fashion, even though her head was held very high and she moved haughtily.

A light breakfast snatched in a tempting looking little coffee house, and Dulcie bought a paper and prepared to while away the hours until any one as important as the president of the Sterling Steel Corporation might be expected to appear in his suite of offices.

The fact that Brill and his clan would delight in the mysterious disappearance of Duane Somers's puzzling fiancée did not bother her in the least. All reason for her to keep to the bargain she had made had been swept away the night before with Duane's own words and actions.

The offices of the Sterling Steel Corporation were quietly handsome, with the sort of luxury that suggests a solid foundation.

Dulcie sank back in a deeply soft chair when her card was taken in to the president. There had been no trouble about it. The young man who had approached her had simply read the card and bowed her to a seat.

Looking about, Dulcie decided that a secretaryship in that imposing suite was a reward worth working for, and for a moment her courage sank. How could she fill the position, even if this man, who thought her a good sport, gave her a trial? And suppose, because she had stolen the card and run away and shirked her part of the bargain, Stephen had talked with this man?

A sick feeling swept over Dulcie, but she had little time to picture the worst. The young man came back and led the way through two other offices, through a door marked "Private" and there he left her, alone in a small exquisitely appointed room with a young man who sat at a desk.

Dulcie went forward quietly, summoning the final remnant of her courage, for upon this man she must make a good impression. He must hear her story and believe in her and sympathize!

Then she got the shock of her life!

She swayed back until she leaned against the side of the soft couch.

The man who rose and stood gravely regarding her across the desk was Stephen Somers!

"You!" gasped Dulcie, and could say no more.

Stephen bowed.

"I am the man to whom you were to come when Duane won the election," he told her. "In other words, I offered you the job myself. I am the president of the Sterling Steel Corporation. You took this card from my safe last night. Do you think you deserve the job, Dulcie?"

Dulcie flushed, but she held her lovely little head high. Her eyes mocked him and they refused to fall before his steady gaze.

"Do you think I could stay in your house and be insulted by your brother?" she demanded. "Last night he kissed me against my will, held me in his arms and told me he thought me a cheap little adventuress. He said he had no intention of living up to his part of the bargain, that he meant to keep me and force me to marry him! I could not stay after that. Do you think I could?"

A flush of anger flared across Stephen's handsome face.

"Did Duane do that?" he snapped.

"Yes. I will not return to your house, nor will I help your brother in this thing for a moment longer!" Dulcie trembled with anger. "I came here to tell this friend of yours the true story. I thought he might give me a position anyhow. Keeping my part of the bargain was made impossible for me."

"Yes, of course you could not go on after that," said Stephen slowly, his eyes intent on the girl. "Duane is a fool. He will have to get out of this the best way he can. It is something else that worries me. You took this card, of course, from my safe."

Dulcie's eyes fell at last. She was honestly ashamed of that.

"Yes, I did," she admitted. "I saw you leave the safe with some papers in your hand and I went and got the card. I have paid for this chance, but, of course, now it is impossible. I expected to find a stranger. I thought—"

Stephen brushed her words aside.

"Dulcie, last night my mother's diamonds were taken from that safe!" he said. "They are valued at fifty thousand dollars!"

Dulcie shrank from him, her lovely face paling.

"Do you think that I—" she could say no more.

"Of course not!" thundered Stephen. "But you were at the safe, you were there. I looked for you this morning to ask you what you saw, what you heard—I wanted to question you. I never missed that card until you sent it here to me a few minutes ago."

"And then you knew I was the thief!" cried Dulcie with a bitter laugh.

"Don't be silly!" smiled Stephen. "Of course I do not think you took the gems. I told you, didn't I, that the man who would give you this position thought you a good sport and was intrigued by the situation? But you must see what Duane's enemies would make of this if they knew."

"I don't care what anybody does to Duane!" cried Dulcie hotly. "I hate him! But to have you think—I cannot bear to have you think badly of me! You must believe I stole those diamonds!"

As she looked at Stephen, into his intent eyes, at his firm lips, Dulcie knew, with a rush of mad feeling, that she loved him, that she could not live if he thought badly of her! What could she do to win his love? For she could not live if she did not.

"It has never been in my mind to suspect you of anything wrong," Stephen was saying gently. "Can you tell me anything that might point to the thief? Think hard now."

"No," said Dulcie wretchedly. "I just slipped into the room and out again. There was no one else there."

"If the party that is opposing us knew these facts, you can see what could be made of them," said Stephen. "It would be far more unpleasant for you than it would be for Duane."

"They would call me a thief," nodded Dulcie desperately, "and it would ruin him. But I don't care for that. I don't care for anything but your good opinion!"

"You know you have it," reminded Stephen quietly. "And I do not blame you in the least, Dulcie. Only I hoped that you might—"

Dulcie started suddenly, and her eyes brightened.

"I have remembered something!" she cried. "That Brill man was in the hall when I came out of the library with the card. He said something to me about when would we have the wedding bells. He was walking up and down near the library door."

"Brill!" Stephen looked at her keenly. "Of course. He stopped to ask some silly question that was none of his business. It is a way they have had lately of keeping tabs on our private affairs. I have often forbidden Brill and his crowd the house, but they come."

"He could have slipped in after I came out, couldn't he?" cried Dulcie, her eyes very bright. "I feel sure he did! Maybe not to get the diamonds, but to look in your safe. He saw me steal from the library and looked in and noted the open safe and then—"

"I never thought of Brill," mused Stephen, walking up and down while Dulcie's tender eyes followed him. "I shall have to decide what to do. I believe you have hit it, Dulcie. My brother's actions have made the bargain null and void and your position

here is waiting for you. I'll help you all I can. Shall we start right away?"

Dulcie gasped.

"Do you mean you are—are sticking to your part of it?" she faltered.

Dulcie came close to him. Her eyes were velvet pools of light, the love that had suddenly come to her in a devastating flood shining in them.

"Is it a position of trust?" she asked softly.

"Yes," said Stephen, taking her trembling hands, "and I am sure you can fill it."

The rest of that day, even in the midst of her bewildering new duties, Dulcie gave almost all her thoughts to the stolen diamonds. Deep in her heart there was, along with the dazzling knowledge of her love, a realization of the splendid part Stephen Somers had played all through the affair.

Toward five o'clock she tried to thank him for his faith in her and to apologize for some of the cruel things she had said, to establish a sort of peace between them, but he brushed aside her words with a smile.

"Don't let's go back to any of that. Miss Stetson, our head bookkeeper, has an apartment which she used to share with a girl who has gone away. I think she would like you to live with her for a time."

Dulcie flushed warmly. Her eyes dwelt upon Somers with that warm new light in them.

"I'll ask her," she said after a moment. "And please believe that I shall try to make good here."

Stephen lifted his hand. "Never say that again, Dulcie. I know you will. And if Brill or the reporters get to you, send them to me. I'll look for you here in the morning."

"But the diamonds—" faltered Dulcie.

Stephen smiled at her in a tired way then. As she saw that smile Dulcie realized that Stephen had struggled all his life to make Duane accomplish something and that his brother's election meant a great deal to him. Yet he was not even asking her to keep to her part of the bargain!

"Don't worry about the diamonds," said Stephen grimly. "I know you could not do anything save what you did, Dulcie. I have my brother to settle with yet."

"Please let him be," said Dulcie eagerly. "If you wish me to, I will go back to your home and play out the game. I cannot refuse to be as big as you have been, Stephen. I know what this election means to you now. I know why you spoke as you did at the hospital."

For a moment Stephen looked into Dulcie's eyes with a passion she had never seen. Then he spoke sharply.

"You will never return to that house while Duane is in it, Dulcie. I am done with championing him. He must stand on his own feet now. But he shall answer to me for what happened last night."

Dulcie flushed with warm happiness. For a moment she had seen into Stephen's heart!

MISS STETSON was delighted to take Dulcie home with her, and they got supper together gayly.

The apartment was small and cozy, and in no time at all Dulcie was established there. Still another step from the MacGillicuddy environment! And all thanks to that brilliant magazine which perhaps still lay upon her sagging bed in the boarding house!

But Dulcie heard little of her companion's chatter about the office. She

could not get out of her head the thought of Brill and the diamonds.

If she could nab Brill with those diamonds, fifty thousand dollars' worth of them.

A little thrill of excited anticipation ran through Dulcie. She loved Stephen, and that love made her feel as though she could conquer kingdoms to help him. It was up to her to get those diamonds!

"My goodness!" said Miss Stetson, "you are as jumpy as can be! For a girl who has had the stroke of luck you had to-day, having the king himself take up for you after you broke off with his brother—"

"Oh, I'm nervous," said Dulcie and jammed her little hat on her pretty head. "I think I'll just run out for a breath of air."

Out in the crisp chill of the night Dulcie was conscious only of one thing. She wanted to do something big for the man she loved! She wanted to force Duane to make good for him, and she wanted to *get that job* for Duane Somers!

Stepping into a drug store, Dulcie found the address she sought. Brill lived in an apartment house farther uptown. It was in a moderate priced neighborhood, and Dulcie knew it well. One of madame's girls had lived there once, and she had gone to see her when she was ill.

As she hurried along through the chill night air Dulcie tried to recall every detail of the apartment house. She could find out from the cards in the hall just where Brill's apartment was. Then she could slip upstairs while the elevator was on one of its trips. Unless they had altered things greatly in a year, there was only one colored boy on duty downstairs.

But after she got in, then what? How learn whether or not Brill had those diamonds and where they were; and how, all this accomplished, to get them from him?

It seemed like a large order. But some of the daring that had inspired her the day she came upon the wrecked roadster now took possession of Dulcie. And she had her love for Stephen to urge her on.

Somehow she would turn the trick for him!

Fortune again smiled upon Dulcie Edgecomb. For when she had successfully slipped upstairs to the Brill apartment some one had been foolish enough to leave the door ajar, and, stopping, Dulcie peered through the crack into the lighted room.

INSIDE the room two men were bending over a table. One was Brill himself, but the other she had never seen before. They were looking at something. Dulcie could not see what it was, but she could imagine.

"It is a daring play," said the man she did not know.

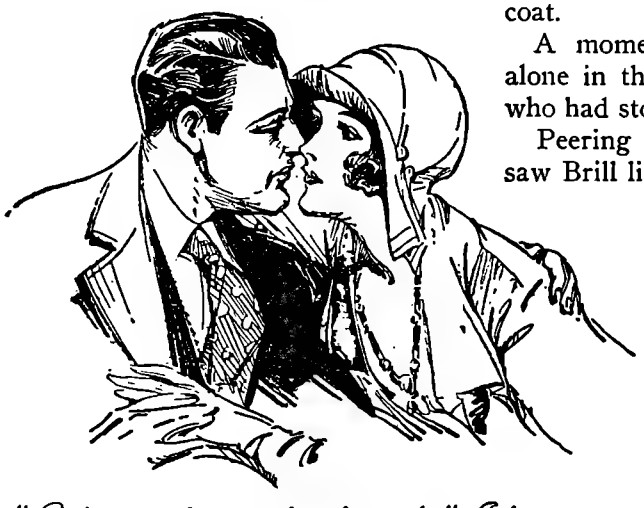
"Not at all," laughed Brill. "I tell you, he was never engaged to the girl. She was employed by a fashionable modiste until the woman died and she boarded in a third-rate boarding house. Somers never came to see her there, and the landlady doesn't believe the girl ever knew him. This was just Stephen Somers's clever work. He paid the back room rent and took the girl's suitcase away.

"I saw that girl sneaking out of the library last night. I went in to see what she had got out of that safe, and—oh, well, just to look around. I've always known there was plenty we could get on Duane Somers if we just had a good break. And then I saw the cases of jewels, and the idea hit me. The story

goes to the papers to-morrow. I've found out the girl hasn't yet shown up at the Somers house."

Dulcie, listening tensely, shivered with anger.

"It is a great stunt if Steve doesn't catch you," said the other man grimly.



"Girl of my dreams," he whispered, "I love you! Kiss me!"

"I wouldn't want to be in your place if he does."

"He won't," sneered Brill. "How could he? Nobody would think of me but the girl, and she won't mention that safe, you can bet a hat on that. She took something out of it herself. Nobody will ever see her again, but I'll find her. I am going to need her. And after Skelton has the job we can return the diamonds with thanks. Anonymous thanks!"

So they had been spying upon her all along! They had gone to the boarding house, talked with Mrs. MacGillicuddy! Unless she got those jewels the morning papers would probably brand her as a thief, no matter what Stephen did.

Oh, to get her hands on those gems!

Dulcie shrank back against the wall. She looked about for a place to hide, for the other man was saying good night. Inside the door there was an alcove with some heavy drapes before it. Without giving herself time to think she slipped into the little hallway and crept behind those drapes, just as Brill's caller picked up his hat and coat.

A moment more and Dulcie was alone in the apartment with the man who had stolen the Somers diamonds.

Peering from the curtains, Dulcie saw Brill light a pipe and step into the next room. In a moment she heard the sound of running water. He was washing up, probably before going out. Would he leave the diamonds in the apartment? She felt sure it had been the gems Brill and the man had been looking at.

But if so, where were they now?

Brill returned to the outer room, carrying something in his hands. Dulcie could not see what it was.

He paused for a moment near the windows and then left the room again. What was the man doing? Was he hiding the diamonds?

Dulcie felt that she would go mad if she could not soon find out, and she stole softly forward into the outer room.

A quick glance about gave no hint of any hiding place where the gems might have been concealed. The hopelessness of her mission swept over the girl. Had she better just go to Stephen and tell him what she had heard?

But if she left there, Brill might go out, taking the diamonds with him. And then no one would find them in

his possession in time to stop that lurid story.

She would stay. She would hide and permit the man to leave, if that was his intention, trusting to her wits to guess whether or not he took the stolen jewels with him. Perhaps Stephen was having him shadowed. At any rate, she must search that apartment for those gems.

DULCIE was stealing back to her alcove behind the draperies when a heavy hand fell on her shoulder.

"Well, so it is you!" said Brill, looking delightedly at her frightened face. "The pretty little adventuress! Now we shall get the true story! Did you come here to steal from me? Or to come over to our side?"

Dulcie looked steadily back at him. She did not quite know what to do. If she screamed for help it might bring ruin upon them all.

"You stole the diamonds from the Somers safe last night," she said quietly. "I saw you and I have come to get them. If you want that story published, try to stop me from leaving here."

"You will have to find the diamonds first, my dear," grinned Brill. "And if you do find them, I can say you brought them to me yourself you know, to bribe me to help you turn a trick against Duane Somers since he refused to pay you the money you had both agreed on for your little comedy. I can make up a very entertaining yarn."

He was putting her out of the apartment, Dulcie struggling like a little wild cat, when suddenly the unlatched door swung wider and Stephen Somers darted through it.

"You come across with those diamonds, Brill," grated Stephen through his teeth, as he seized the other man by the throat.

"He has them, Stephen," cried Dulcie eagerly. "I saw him looking at them."

"You'll never find those gems in my possession, Somers," gritted Brill as he struggled with Stephen.

As the men swung about the room Dulcie looked everywhere for some sort of weapon with which to assist Stephen. She scarcely heard Stephen demanding that Brill tell him where the diamonds were and Brill's sneering refusals, and she slipped out of the way as chairs and tables crashed over during the struggle.

When the aquarium which stood near the window went down with a great clatter, the water spilled over Dulcie's feet. She had been stooping near it to pick up a heavy cane and the sight of the little fish flopping about on the handsome rug among the pebbles and the broken glass turned her slightly sick.

And then something caught her eye, something that was not broken glass shimmering up at her from the wreckage of the broken aquarium!

"Stephen! I have them—I've found the diamonds!" she cried. "Let him go, Stephen—I've got your jewels!"

Brill was beaten anyhow. As Dulcie came forward holding the necklace, the two bracelets and a bar pin, Stephen let him slip to the floor, where he lay limply.

"Brill," said Stephen, every word as definite as clipped steel, "this means victory for my brother. You will not move from now on or you will be branded for the thief you are. I've caught you with the goods, but if it had not been for Miss Edgecomb I would have been too late. It was she, too, who told me that you had the

diamonds. I hardly believed it of you, but I had to come and find out. Now, if you circulate a word about this young lady and my brother, I will come out openly and tell what I know, and there will be nothing in your past or present that will be left a secret! The public will know what sort of men Skelton employs. Do you understand me?"

"I understand," growled Brill as he swayed to his feet, his eyes closed and his lip cut. "I know when I'm licked."

With a brief glance at the glittering jewels held out to him by Dulcie, Stephen thrust them into his pocket and took her arm.

"Come," he said, and led her down to the street where stood the familiar cream-colored roadster.

"I'll take you home," said Stephen, and put her carefully into the car.

BUT, without any apparent reason, he turned into the park.

"Now, what did you do that for?" asked Stephen, turning the fire of his dark eyes upon the girl's flushed face. "You little brick!"

"I did it for you!" cried Dulcie eagerly.

"I never thought you would do anything so wild," said Stephen tenderly. "But I might have known. You are going to quit arranging your life from now on. That is going to be my job. I fancy we have our enemies sufficiently subdued for the public to stand the shock of Duane's fiancée becoming engaged to his brother! I love you madly, Dulcie. I have from the first moment I saw you. What have you to say to me, sweetheart? Will you marry me?"

And Stephen Somers stooped to caress the sweet lips that were lifted, wordless, to his.

"My sweetheart," he whispered, "the girl of my dreams! Oh, darling, life will be so fine! With you to love I'll make you proud of me. Dearest heart, my little wife-to-be, I love you! Kiss me again!"

Dulcie, happier than she ever thought she could be, answered her lover's kiss.

Alone

YOU gave me a home of twenty rooms,
Almost a palace, I heard you say;
'Tis only a place of twenty tombs,
When you're away.

You brought me a robe, from neck to feet
Fit for a princess. Listen, dear:
My robe is only a winding sheet
When you're not here.

Rich am I, in the parlance of men,
Yet a gypsy bride may hold her own
In the fragrant dusk, on a daisied fen,
While I'm alone!

—*L. Mitchell Thornton*

"You're a swell little pal," he told her. But his eyes said much more

Love at West Point

Judy treated her chosen mate like a comrade instead of a lover. But the new girl had a better—and more dangerous—method!

By Helen Ahern

Author of "Spotlight and Lovelight," etc.

FROM her bedroom window Judy Travers looked out at the cadets on parade. The gray and white of their uniforms made vivid contrast with the fresh green of the Plain. Brass buttons gleamed jewel-like in the June sunshine. It was a scene that Colonel Travers's daughter had witnessed every day for almost a year, but she watched breathlessly. West Point was always new to her.

She was trying to pick one particular cadet out of the marching ranks. A hopeless task! At a distance the gray-and-white-clad youths looked as much alike as so many peas in a pod. Judy shook her head and turned from the window.

"Gosh, I must have it bad!"

She made the statement aloud in an awed whisper, for Judy had just discovered that she was in love. It was a

new experience. Never before in all her nineteen busy years had she hung out of a window to catch a glimpse of a man. Never, until she met Cadet Vance Leyton, had her heart throbbed wildly at the sound of a man's voice. Never before had her eyes dwelt lovingly on a man's face.

She had known plenty of men. Out in the Arizona army post where she was raised there had been plenty of young bachelor officers, who had taught her to ride, to dance, to swing a golf club, and to send over a fast serve at tennis. Judy had played with them, had given them her friendship; but she had laughed at their attempts at love-making.

When her father was transferred to the United States Military Academy as an instructor, Judy had met the West Point cadets and used the same tactics. She despised feminine artifice. Her honest blue eyes were as direct as a small boy's.

This love business, as Judy described it a shade scornfully, had caught her unawares. Yesterday she had met Vance as comrade to comrade. To-day she was tingling all over at the mere thought of his steady, steel-gray eyes, his crisp red-brown hair, that kinked so adorably in spite of an army haircut, and his voice, with its hint of a Southern drawl. That voice did something to her.

She flew to the mirror. Surely some change would be visible in her appearance!

No, thank Heavens! The girl in the glass looked anything but lovesick. She was the same Judy, in a yellow tennis dress, slender and straight, with bare, sun-tanned legs and arms. She did not linger over her reflections. Judy was without vanity, and she had no idea that she made a symphony in gold—golden dress, golden skin, bobbed golden hair.

SHE looked at her wrist watch. Four o'clock—parade would be over, and she had promised to meet Vance for a set of tennis. She snatched up her racket and started down the stairs two at a time.

"Judith!" Her mother's voice stopped her in the hall. "She's coming to-morrow at noon."

Mrs. Travers came out with a yellow telegram in her hand.

"Who?" inquired Judy.

"Mary Lou Kent."

"Whoops, what a name!"

Judy bounced a tennis ball against the ceiling and caught it deftly on her racket.

"Judith, must you be such a tomboy?" Mrs. Travers, a demure, low-voiced little woman, chided the exuberant girl.

"Mary Lou! Can't you just imagine what she'll be with a handle like that?" Judy's voice trailed off into laughter.

"'What's in a name?' Wasn't it Shakespeare who made that crack?" Colonel Travers surveyed his wife and daughter amusedly from the doorway. He was a lean, iron-gray man, whose military sternness was relieved by his eyes. They were the same bright blue as Judy's, and they twinkled beneath bushy eyebrows. "Who is this Mary Lou person, anyhow?" he asked.

"Don't you remember, dear? She's Mollie Randall's daughter, and she's coming to visit us," replied Mrs. Travers. "If she's anything like her mother, she'll be a pretty girl. Mollie Randall, or Kent, as she is now, was a real beauty; and she had the 'It' that you young folks, Judy, are always talking about."

"Of course she'll be pretty"—Judy

winked at her father mischievously—"in a pre-flapper, pre-Volstead style. She'll be a quaint, shy little thing, and all scared and thrilly inside over her first visit to West Point!"

"I hope you'll see that it's a pleasant visit. Mollie Randall was my roommate and best friend at college."

"Of course, darling! We'll turn out the post for the daughter of your old side-kick. I'll speak to Vance and Tim Carley, and tell them they've got to give the little girl from the country a great big hand."

Judy gave her mother slangy but genuine reassurance. She would surely do what she could to insure a good time for Mary Lou Kent. The girl might be two or three kinds of lemon, but evidently her visit meant a lot to mother.

Mrs. Travers had urged her old friend to visit them. Mollie Kent wrote that she could not come, but was sending Mary Lou. The girl would be just in time for the cadets' summer camp, the gayest part of the year at West Point.

The poor little kid was probably all of a do-flop over a trip to the famous post on the Hudson, thought Judy indulgently.

"Don't worry!"

With this final assurance she dropped a kiss on the top of her mother's smooth brown head, waved to her father, and raced for the outdoors in a flash of golden legs and arms. She would speak to Vance this very afternoon about Mary Lou, and make him promise to fill her card for to-morrow night's hop.

MARY LOU was forgotten, everything that belonged to the practical, workaday, playaday world was forgotten, when Judy saw Vance striding toward her through the afternoon sunshine. She loved the long, lean grace of him, his bronzed, thin face that lighted up with his own funny little grin. She was entirely absorbed in his nearness; but she must not let him suspect her inner turmoil.

It would not be hard to make Vance fall in love with her, but love and cadet life do not mix.

Vance was a first class man now, with another year's training ahead before he would get his coveted commission in the United States Army. Judy was a true daughter of the army, and she wanted Vance to get his place in it. He had worked hard for the past three years, and he must not be distracted during this last twelvemonth.

After graduation there would be time enough to think about love.

The sapphire eyes that she raised to Vance were unclouded by coquetry.

"'Lo, old thing!" She greeted him as man to man. "Think you'll be able to send back my serves to-day?"

It was the most effective line she could have taken to forestall sentiment. Judy's superiority in tennis was a sore point with Vance.

"I'm going to trip you this time or break a leg!" Vance said grimly. "You need to have some of the conceit taken out of you."

"And you think you're the one to do it?"

Laughing and bantering, they made their way to the tennis court, where Judy beat Vance two sets out of three. She hated to win that last set from him. More than once she was tempted to let a ball go by and give him the winning point. It would make him feel masterful and satisfied to beat her, and he would patronize her and like her a great deal more. But he mustn't like her too much—not yet.

As they walked home across the Plain, Judy gave herself up to pleasant speculation. Next June! Then she would let him win from her in any game they might play. She would glory in bowing to his will, and he would love her for her weakness. He would take her in his arms—those strong arms that held her so close in the dance the other night.

Judy was appalled at her errant thoughts. A slow flush rose under her golden tan, and she stole a sidelong glance at Vance, as if fearful that he might read her imaginings.

"It sure gets my goat the way you trim me at tennis," he said; "but you're a swell little pal, just the same."

A swell little pal, he called her! But the warmth in his gray eyes said more. For a dangerous, ecstatic minute Judy feared—no, hoped—

What ailed her? She must get better control of herself.

"You sound like Al Jolson with that 'little pal' stuff," she said, forcing a teasing tone.

Vance looked annoyed and changed the subject.

"How about taking me on for more tennis to-morrow, same time?"

"You're a bear for punishment, aren't you? Sorry, but I can't." Tardily Judy remembered Mary Lou. "We have a house guest coming—a girl from Iowa—and I'll have to play hostess. Come on over to tea, and bring some of the boys to meet Mary Lou."

"Mary Lou from Io-way! I met a girl from Iowa at the graduation hop, and she was an awful wet smack."

"Wet smack or not, you're going to be nice to Mary Lou." Judy gave her orders with her father's best air of command. "She's a daughter of one of mother's old friends, and it's her first trip to West Point—probably her first trip any place."

"If that's the case, we'll do our best. I'll ask the fellows to rush the little lady. Tim can drag her to the hop. Is she pretty?"

"Her mother was a beauty in her day."

"That doesn't mean anything. Beautiful mothers often have homely daughters."

"Is that a slam at me?" Judy burlesqued dismay. "You know my mother's a knock-out for looks."

"Oh, you'll pass in a crowd. The rule doesn't always hold."

Vance grinned down at her. Judy made a face at him and returned to Mary Lou.

"Seriously, Vance, you'll be nice to the poor little kid, won't you?"

"You can count on me to show her the time of her life."

"Thanks!" Judy extended her hand and sealed the bargain, boy fashion, with a handshake. "See you to-morrow at tea."

She almost ran into the house. The touch of his fingers had been magic fire.

At the doorstep she paused and looked back. She had a moment of doubt. Vance had looked somewhat hurt when she had flip-cracked about little pal stuff. Was she taking the right course?

LIFE at West Point, for a girl as popular as Judy Travers, leaves little chance for moping. The Traverses' living room was headquarters for cadets released from quarters. Dinner was barely over when half a dozen yearlings, as the third class men were called, barged in, and Judy seized the opportunity to do some more missionary work for Mary Lou.

"What's she like?" was the cadets' first question, for they were always curious about a new girl.

"You'll see!"

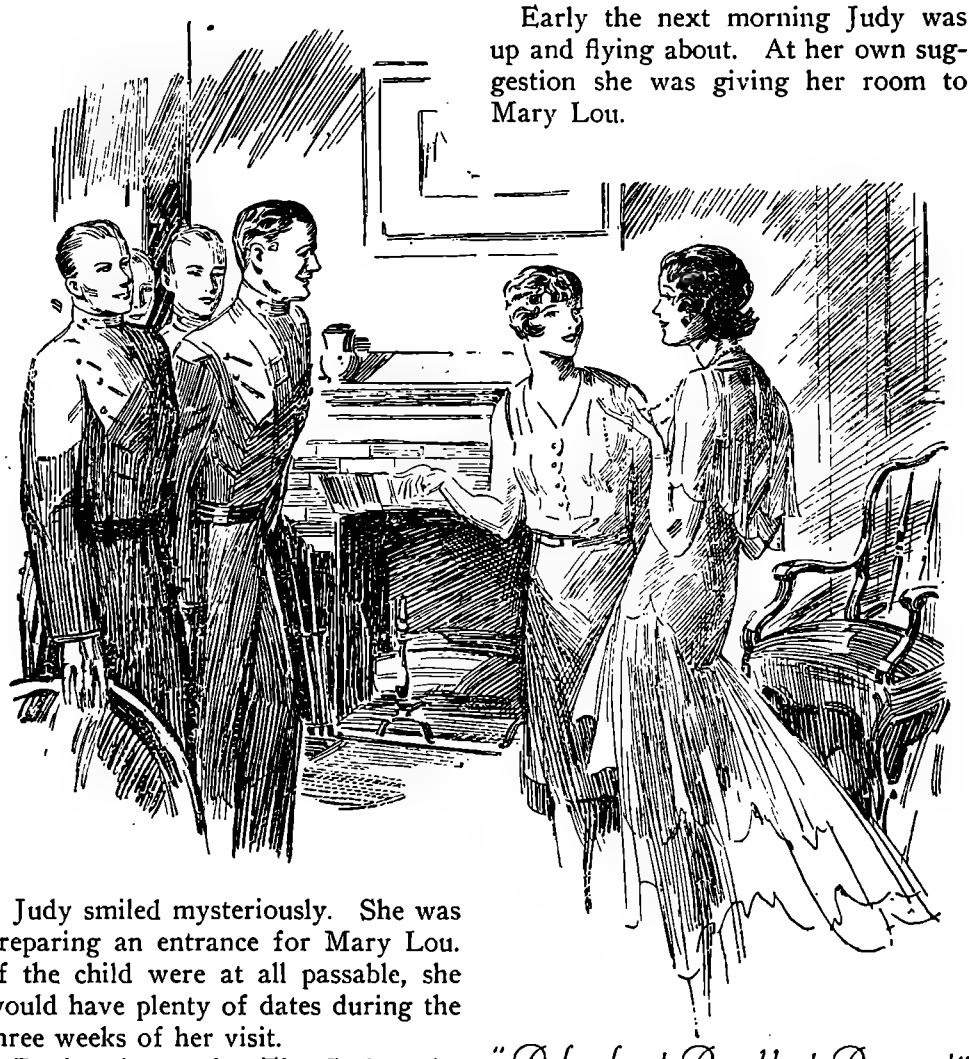
Judy smiled mysteriously. She was preparing an entrance for Mary Lou. If the child were at all passable, she would have plenty of dates during the three weeks of her visit.

During the evening Tim Carley telephoned to say that he would take Mary Lou to the hop.

"Vance asked me to," he said simply.

Judy smiled to herself. Tim would have escorted a Fiji Islander or an Eskimo at Leyton's request. He and Vance were the Damon and Pythias of the corps. Ever since plebe days they had shared a barracks room or a tent camp. Big, clumsy, freckle-faced Tim worshiped the handsome, soldierly Vance.

Early the next morning Judy was up and flying about. At her own suggestion she was giving her room to Mary Lou.



"A knockout! A goddess! A queen!" their eyes told her

"But the guest room will be all right for her," Mrs. Travers protested the change.

"Yes, but she'll have such a splendid view of the Plain from my side window! I can still remember the thrill I got out of it when we first came

to West Point. I don't mind moving at all."

She carried clothes, books, tennis rackets, and golf sticks to the guest room, where she tossed them on the bed in a tumbled heap. Later she would straighten out the mess. Just now her own room, temporarily Mary Lou's, was the first consideration.

With one eye on the fast moving hands of the clock, Judy dashed about with broom and duster. Ten minutes to twelve!

"Judy, the boat's coming!" Mrs. Travers called up the stairs.

"I'll be right down!" replied her daughter, all excitement.

The Day Line boat was pulling in when Judy and her mother reached the dock. Judy scanned the deck, trying to pick out Mary Lou. She was increasingly excited over the coming guest. She had never had a sister, or even a close girl friend, in all her life.

The boat was emptying slowly. All the strange girls seemed to belong to parties or to welcoming hosts and hostesses. Only one girl was left—a slender, flamboyantly beautiful girl, who strolled along the dock with leisurely confidence. Judy stared, spellbound by her loveliness. From the top of her close-fitting felt hat to the toe of her dainty buckled slippers, she was perfect. Her light-weight green tweed traveling suit was a masterpiece of tailoring.

But it was her face that riveted Judy's eyes. Her features were cameo-like in their delicacy. Her skin recalled the soft, dull white of gardenia blossoms, against which her eyes were wells of midnight. A wing of dusky silken hair curled lovingly against each cheek from beneath her smart little hat. Judy, who loved beauty, caught her breath in sheer admiration.

"That must be Mary Lou," said Mrs. Travers, staring in the direction of the unknown beauty.

"Oh, it couldn't be!" declared Judy.

THIS exquisite girl, arrogant in the knowledge of her own loveliness, could not possibly be shy little Mary Lou!

"She's the only girl left; and she reminds me a little of Mollie."

Mrs. Travers walked up to the dark-eyed girl, who smiled.

"You're Mrs. Travers, aren't you? I'm Mary Lou Kent," she said, stretching out a small, spotlessly gloved hand.

"My dear child!" Mrs. Travers ignored the hand and took Mary Lou in her arms. "I'm so glad to be welcoming Mollie's daughter!"

Mary turned a smooth cheek to her hostess's kiss.

"It was sweet of you to ask me. I've been East several times to proms, but I never had a chance to come up to West Point before," she said graciously. "Charming place, isn't it?"

Her nod bestowed approval on the picturesque fortifications that towered above them. Mrs. Travers pulled her daughter forward.

"And this is Judy," she said. "I'm sure you girls will be great friends."

Judy suddenly felt very young and awkward. She was miserably aware that her nose was as shiny as her finger nails should have been.

Mary Lou gave her a sweet, faintly condescending smile.

"You make me feel horribly dressed up," the visitor said. "You're a real outdoor girl, aren't you?"

Her eyes swept the other girl's bare legs and arms. Judy flushed, sensing a sting behind the soft words. To hide her resentment, she stooped and gathered up Mary Lou's traveling bag.

"Let's get going," she suggested.

As they walked through the imposing entrance to the now deserted Plain, Mary Lou chattered amiably. She was apparently unmoved by the awesome beauty of the Academy buildings that still thrilled Judy.

"Where are the cadets?" she asked. "They're the most interesting part of West Point."

"At this hour they're all in the mess hall." Judy noticed a shade of disappointment cross Mary Lou's lovely face. "You'll see some of them this afternoon. I've asked a gang over to tea."

Mary Lou grew animated.

"Tea? How nice! Let's hurry, so we can rest and have plenty of time to dress."

Mary Lou was a new species to Judy. She had seen such girls from afar at hops. "Professional females," she had called them. They made a study and a practice of femininity, and were interested in nothing but their own charms and the other sex. Judy had never understood these girls. She did not understand Mary Lou, nor quite like her, although it was impossible to dislike any one so lovely.

WHEN luncheon was over, Judy curled up on her bed and tried to figure out just why she and Mary Lou had failed to "click." She had wanted so much to like the girl from Iowa, and had awaited her almost like a long lost sister. Of course, she had expected a timid, deferential sort of Mary Lou, who could be petted and protected. Judy laughed aloud at the idea of taking care of the real Mary Lou.

"May I come in?" Mrs. Travers rapped on the bedroom door. "Well, what do you think of her?"

She came in and seated herself. Her usually calm face was slightly worried.

"She's very lovely," Judy answered evasively.

"Yes, but I'm afraid she's spoiled." Mrs. Travers sighed. "I can't understand it. Mollie Randall was the sweetest, most unselfish girl alive."

"That's why she has a spoiled daughter," suggested Judy. "She's probably waited on her hand and foot."

"She must spend every cent they have on Mary Lou." Mrs. Travers had an eye for clothes. "I always understood from her letters that they had a hard time to make ends meet."

No matter what the Traverses, mother and daughter, might think of the new arrival, the cadets' opinion of Mary Lou that afternoon was unreserved and unanimous. They vied with one another in whispered praise of the new girl.

"She's a knock-out—a wow—a goddess—a queen!"

Mary Lou had waited until the living room was practically filled with uniformed young men, who had come in answer to Judy's invitation. Then she made her entrance. Her traveling suit had been replaced by a soft flame chiffon afternoon dress, which clung to her graceful body and emphasized the creamy white of her skin and the darkness of her hair and eyes.

Judy heard an audible "Ah!" from the cadets, who were staring in amazed admiration.

"She's divine!" Vance Leyton's awed voice sounded in Judy's ear. "You lucky stiff!" He turned to Tim Carley with unconcealed envy. "You've got your reward for doing a good deed. Think of drawing a girl like that for the hop on a blind date!"

Judy was stabbed with a twinge of

something that might have been jealousy. Vance was taking her to the hop. Why should he envy Tim? She wished now that she had dressed up for the tea. She had been so much disgusted with Mary Lou's elaborate preparations that out of sheer perversity she had refused to do more than change to a fresh tennis dress.

VANCE gazed at the Western girl with entranced eyes. Judy didn't blame him, for Mary Lou was an exquisite thing. He could no more help admiring her than he could help admiring a lovely picture, a grand sunset, or a beautiful flower. Judy's heart was heavy as she led him over to her fascinating guest.

Mary Lou's midnight eyes lighted appreciatively as they rested on Vance's engaging face and his trim military build. He was easily the handsomest man in the room. She gave barely a nod to big, bashful Tim Carley, who was presented to her at the same time as her partner for the evening's hop.

"A captain!" Mary Lou's voice was flatteringly awed by the title that Judy had used in introducing Vance. "I knew you were somebody important!"

Vance beamed, but he tried to be modest.

"Not so very important," he said. "I'm just a cadet officer."

"But I think that's marvelous. I'm just thrilled to death by West Point!"

Judy remembered Mary Lou's bored attitude toward the post earlier in the day, and marveled at her present vivacity. Her voice took on little cooing, ecstatic notes.

"It's a great old place." Vance was pleased by her enthusiasm over his beloved Academy.

"I'm going to adore it here. You boys are all so darling to me! I feel quite at home already."

Judy wandered off. She need feel no anxiety about her guest having a good time. Mary Lou knew her stuff with the men. At the rate she was going, she would have the whole post at her feet inside of a week.

Judy felt left out and forgotten. The cadets had eyes for no one but Mary Lou. Even Vance seemed enslaved. He hung over her so closely that he must be breathing the jasmine perfume that she had sprayed generously over her hair before coming down to tea.

His growing infatuation was a distasteful sight to Judy. To escape it, she hurried out to the kitchen, where she piled sandwiches on plates, poured out iced tea, and tried to quiet her fears. After all, Vance was hers—her friend, her playmate. He might have been her lover, too, if she had encouraged sentiment. Yesterday he had looked at her as if he loved her; and Judy took comfort in the memory. He was just following her instructions and being nice to Mary Lou.

THE cadets took their departure at the call to quarters, simultaneously and without much ceremony.

"For mess formation," Vance explained patiently to Mary Lou. "It's army regulations."

She and Judy walked over to the camp with him. They watched the formation and Mary Lou became thoughtful on the way back.

"Judy, the cadets you meet socially—you must know something about their families and background." Mary Lou hesitated a moment and then added: "Vance Leyton, for instance—he's a gentleman, isn't he?"

"Certainly!" Little sapphire points of anger glittered in Judy's eyes at the suggestion that Vance could be anything but a gentleman. "You ought to know that. He's one of the most prominent boys at the post."

"I thought he was all right, but you can't always tell. I'm glad to hear you say he's O. K. socially"—Mary Lou laughed with soft satisfaction—"because I have a hunch that he's going to give me a lot of time!"

She was just a heartbroken little girl, sobbing for a love that might have been

It was plain that she had taken the word "prominent" to imply wealth, family, and social position. These supposed attractions, coupled with Vance's personal charm, had clinched her desire to annex him.

Judy was frightened at what she had done. She was tempted to tell Mary Lou that by prominent she had meant only that he had made a splendid military and scholastic record and was well liked by his officers and his fellow cadets, and that she knew nothing about his family or his civilian life. This would have been the truth. Now that she thought of it, she realized that Vance had been more than reticent about his upbringing. He had never even mentioned his father or mother. He might have come from the poorest of the poor. If she planted such an idea in Mary Lou's head, it would scare off the little huntress.

"I really don't think—" Judy began and stopped. No, she couldn't do such a thing! It was almost dishonorable to cast doubt of any kind upon Vance. "I don't think you'll find any of the cadets have much time to give." She finished her sentence lamely.

"He'll find time for me!" declared Mary Lou, confident of her charms.

Judy made a desperate effort to divert her guest's intentions from Vance.

"If you want a man with real money, you ought to make a play for Tim Carley," she suggested. "His father's one of the biggest manufacturers in Chicago. He has a radio factory of some kind."

"Who's Tim Carley?"

"That cadet who's taking you to the hop to-night."

"Not that big clumsy fellow, who's all hands and feet? He's a dumb egg—no personality."

"Tim's a splendid fellow," Judy said defensively, "even if he is homely."

"Not for me!" Mary Lou giggled. "I like 'em with the gold, all right, but I want them to have S. A., too."

YET Mary Lou was beautiful—just how beautiful Judy realized afresh when her guest appeared that night dressed for the hop. Mary Lou's round arms and shoulders rose like white water lilies from the scant bodice of her pale sea-green chiffon. Her silken, dusky hair was drawn into a little knot at the base of her neck, to emphasize the classical perfection of her features. She had mystery—allure.

Judy had taken unusual pains with her own attire, for she was determined not to give up Vance without a struggle. To-night was to see a battle between Mary Lou and herself, and she had chosen for her weapon the newest evening gown in her wardrobe. It was a gold cloth creation, very straight and slender. She had been satisfied with the effect it produced in her bedroom mirror. The gold cloth set off her shining hair and made her look like a charming medieval page.

But now! She saw Mary Lou, so silken and soft, and decided that her own dress was garish. She awaited Vance's verdict with inward quaking.

"Grand dress! You look like the Queen of Sheba," he said gayly, when she met him and Tim Carley at the door; but his eyes went beyond her.

She heard him catch his breath. He was looking at Mary Lou. Judy bit her lip to keep back tears. She had lost! Vance's gray eyes had given her friendly approval, but they were shining on Mary Lou with reverence and admiration.

Judy was too sick at heart to block Mary Lou's high-handed switching of partners as they set out for Cullum Hall, where the hop was being held.

"I want you to finish what you were telling me about life here at West Point," she said, and hooked an arm through Vance's.

Tim and Judy trailed behind them. Judy could see the shimmer of Mary Lou's white velvet evening wrap as she moved along beside Vance—very close to him, too—through the warm June dusk. Her frequent laughter tinkled back like a faint silver bell. Judy wanted to rush up, tear the other girl from Vance's side and thrust herself between them. She knew jealousy—hot, savage jealousy.

In spite of her hopelessness, Judy put up a gallant front that night. No one would have guessed that her heart lay cold and dead within her. Her smiles flashed gayly, and she laughed and danced lightly.

She had several dances with Vance—dances that were more pain than joy. It hurt to be in his arms, so close to him, yet so far-away. At the last hop, only a few nights ago, he had been vividly aware of her. His arms had unconsciously tightened, and his eyes

had been for her alone. Now he was watching over the top of her head for a glimpse of Mary Lou.

At length Vance spoke.

"Gosh, Judy, I can never thank you enough," he said.

"For what?"

"For introducing me to a girl like Mary Lou."

Unconsciously Judy's hand flew to her throat, as if to drive away the lump that threatened to choke her.

"She's a dream come true—so lovely, so sweet, so tender," Vance went on dreamily. "She looks like a picture I have of my mother as a girl. It's unbelievable! I was so lonely for a woman's love, a woman's understanding—and then came Mary Lou!"

He had been lonely, hungry for love! Judy's hand clenched at her side until her finger nails dug into her palms. She had been blind, blind, blind! He had wanted to love and be loved. She had waited—and then came Mary Lou!

"I've got the next dance with her," he added, as eagerly as a small boy.

"Come now, little corporal, you're a soldier girl!" Judy whispered to herself soundlessly.

These were words that her father had used to comfort childish hurts. Her courage returned. Her face was white under its golden sun tan, but she managed to smile.

Not until she was at home in bed that night did she give way to her anguish. She wasn't a little corporal then. She was just a heartbroken girl who buried her face in her pillows and sobbed for a love that might have been.

ALMOST hourly, during the days that followed, Judy had need of courage. Vance's infatuation for Mary Lou grew rapidly. Quite as a matter of course he took her to the concerts and hops, while Judy was left to Tim or one of her still loyal yearlings. She hated these gayeties, but could not stay at home without arousing comment. Mary Lou, and even Vance himself, might suspect her pain and jealousy. This Judy would not permit.

Her pride was the one thing left her. She would not give her rival the satisfaction of knowing that Vance meant more to her than any other cadet.

Mary Lou would have taken feline delight in such a victory. She often boasted of stealing men from other girls.

"But I could never care in the big way for a fellow who didn't have plenty of money. You see," she said once in a burst of honesty, "I've had enough poverty to last me the rest of my life." Her lovely face hardened. "Everything I buy, everything I do, I have to figure and skimp on the cost. I'd never have any clothes or trips if mother didn't take in sewing to help out. I'm sick of counting pennies!" She laughed abruptly. "Gosh, but I'm filling the air with chatter! I suppose you think I'm a regular gold digger!"

"I don't understand you at all," replied Judy, shaking her head.

Her blue eyes were scornful. This was the girl that Vance thought so sweet and tender!

VANCE was spending every free hour in Mary Lou's company, showing her the sights of the post. At first he had invited Judy to accompany them, but after the first few days she begged off from these expeditions.

"Really, Vance," she said lightly, "I've seen the sights of West Point before. I've got to get in some golf and tennis, so you two run along."

She tried to make her tone casual, for Mary Lou was listening, and would have liked to gloat over Judy. She should never have the chance—never! Judy determined to play the game of pretend to the limit.

She sped them cheerfully on their way, and exhausted herself at two sets of tennis with Tim Carley. She tired easily these days. It seemed as if the ache in her heart had been transmitted to her body.

"Seems to me that you're looking kind of peaked, little corporal," said her father. Colonel Travers's keen eyes were the only ones that saw through Judy's forced vivacity. He had cornered her alone in the breakfast room. "What is it, my dear?" he asked anxiously.

"Why should I look peaked?" returned Judy, trying to evade an answer.

"That's what I'm asking you. Is it that Mary Lou girl?"

"Don't be silly!"

"Your dad's not blind, or dumb, either," the colonel said gently. "What are you letting her get away with it for?"

Judy could feel herself coloring. She couldn't escape from his sympathetic, penetrating gaze.

Colonel Travers took pity on her embarrassment, and changed to a less personal question.

"How much longer is she going to stay around here?" he inquired.

"A couple more weeks. Mother invited her for the month of June."

"Too bad! She's a nuisance in more ways than one. Your poor mother's wearing herself ragged. Mary Lou's that kind of a guest."

Judy knew what he meant. The household work had doubled since the visitor's advent. Mary Lou was utterly thoughtless, or just plain inconsiderate. She was late for meals. She had no regard for regular laundry days, but brought in her silken underthings to Hilda any day, any hour. She used the best towels for removing cold cream. Mrs. Travers and Judy had shouldered the extra work to keep peace with Hilda.

"Well, I guess we can stand her for a couple more weeks. That's not what I'm worrying about. It's Vance." The colonel returned to the real issue with military abruptness. "He's riding for a fall, that boy, and I hate to see it. He's one of the finest cadets at the Academy, and he has the makings of a great army man; but Mary Lou's no wife for a young officer. So do your stuff, little corporal! Give her a run for her money!"

He shot out this advice and departed before Judy could answer.

"Do your stuff!" That was unintended irony. Judy's lips tightened with pain. How could she do her stuff when Vance didn't see her any more, except as a background for Mary Lou?

TIM CARLEY, too, was worried about Vance. He confided in Judy that same night. She and Tim and Mary Lou and Vance had walked over to the weekly concert in front of the superintendent's quarters.

"Let's sit by ourselves," Tim whispered to Judy, and pulled her away from the spot where Vance and Mary Lou had seated themselves "I want to talk to you alone."

Judy was puzzled.

"Spill it," she said, when they had at last found a secluded corner.

"It's about Vance."

Did every one in the world insist on talking Vance to her? She was trying so hard to forget!

"He's making a terrible mistake—about Mary Lou, I mean."

"Vance is old enough to know his own mind," said Judy.

Her voice was harsh. Vance and Mary Lou—every one coupled their names.

"A man's never too old to make a fool of himself over a pretty face, and that's what Vance is doing."

"But you said you'd rush Mary Lou yourself if you thought you had a chance with her!"

"I would." Tim was honest. "I could fall in love with her very easily."

"Then why is Vance a fool to fall for her?" asked Judy, who couldn't follow such reasoning.

"Because he's really in love with somebody else. Mary Lou is just an interlude. Judy"—Tim spoke seriously—"Vance is in love with you. He always has been."

"No, no!"

Judy put out her hands protestingly. Why was Tim torturing her with such fabrications?

"He is. I know Vance pretty well. We've bunked together for three years now. He used to talk to me about you, and about all the plans he had after graduation. They all included you, Judy."

She couldn't speak.

"A commission in the army and then a wedding with swords, and roses, and you—that's what he wanted." Tim paused a moment for emphasis. "It's still what he wants. He couldn't change so quickly. I told you Mary Lou goes to a man's head. Vance is intoxicated with her beauty, that's all. He doesn't see her faults. I do, but I could love her in spite of them. He will hate her when the spell wears off and he finds himself without a commission or a career."

"Without a commission or a career?" Judy was aroused from her own misery. "What do you mean?"

"He's talking about giving up West Point and resigning, to get married."

There was a great roaring in Judy's ears. The lights of the band stand danced dizzily before her. Vance—married—to Mary Lou! Vance leaving West Point, the army!

"But he can't do that," she said faintly. "He loves the corps. He's worked so hard and long for his commission, and he'd never be happy in civilian life."

"That's the point," Tim agreed quickly. "Vance is cut out for a soldier. He's not like me, for instance. I'll never make a good officer. I could drop out of the corps and no one would be hurt—myself least of all; but Vance would suffer. Listen!"

Tim drew Judy to her feet as the band struck up West Point's beautiful song:

> The corps! Bareheaded salute it,
> With eyes up, thanking our God
> That we of the corps are treading,
> Where they of the corps have trod!

Judy had seen more than once the pride, exultation, and awe in Vance's eyes as he listened to that same music. In such moments he was the very spirit of West Point. Give it up? Impossible!

Tim's voice was an echo of her own thoughts.

"We can't let Vance go away from all this," he said, as the last notes of the song died. "We've got to do something."

"But what?" she asked despairingly.

"I DON'T know. I've tried arguing with Vance, but he won't listen. He thinks he's found his ideal in Mary Lou, and he's afraid he might

lose her if he finishes out this last year. I guess she's not very keen about being an officer's wife. She wants Vance to go into business."

"She's a selfish, horrible girl!" cried Judy, the hot words coming from her lips in a rush.

"Don't, Judy! That isn't like you," protested Tim, astonished by her sudden bitterness.

"I'm sorry." Judy was ashamed. "I didn't mean to say things behind her back."

"No, you're not that kind." Tim patted her shoulder clumsily. "Anyhow, Mary Lou is Mary Lou, and we can't change her; but we've got to save Vance's commission for him." He hesitated, then added: "It's up to you, Judy."

"To me?"

"Yes, you've got to use what influence you have with him."

"But I haven't any—not now. He doesn't even know I'm on earth. He—"

Judy's voice broke. She couldn't go on. Tim had made only too plain the full extent of her loss. Vance had loved her and wanted her. He had dreamed of a wedding with swords and roses. She, too, had dreamed, but she had waited—too long!

Tears poured down Judy's cheeks. Tim hovered over her in dismay.

"I didn't know, Judy," he said. "I didn't know you cared like that for him. I didn't mean to hurt you."

"It wasn't your fault, Tim." Judy fought for self-control. "You were thinking of Vance. I'm thinking of him, too, and I'll do anything I can to help."

"Atta girl! You and Vance were made for each other. With you as his wife, he'd go to the top in this army game."

"Don't, please, Tim!"

Judy begged for mercy. These might-have-beens were too cruel.

"All right! Let's get down to business and figure out some way to pry him loose from Mary Lou." Tim took a practical tone. "Can't you think of something?"

"Only—only—"

Judy stopped. What she was about to say would sound like more backbiting.

"Go ahead!"

"Only that Mary Lou wants to—to marry money."

"She should." Tim was not shocked. "Beauty like hers needs money, as much as a valuable jewel needs a fine setting."

"If she knew or thought that Vance was poor—"

Judy let him draw his own conclusions.

"I see!" Tim spoke in a meditative way. "That's an idea, but how are we going to work it? I don't know a thing about Vance's circumstances myself. He's the closest-mouthed chap in the corps."

"It wouldn't be fair to make up things about him. Besides, she wouldn't believe us now. She'd think that I was jealous and that you—"

"That I was trying to boost my own stock with her." Tim laughed ruefully. "Maybe I am," he added. "I don't quite trust myself. Sometimes I'm not sure whether I'm working for Vance's interests or for my own. I do want Mary Lou—and I'd make her an awfully good husband!"

His mingled candor and wistfulness moved Judy. Her hand touched his in a little gesture of sympathy.

"What fools we are, both of us!"

She stood up abruptly. The concert had ended, and she wanted to get home

ahead of Mary Lou and Vance, lest they might see signs of her recent tears.

"'A fool there was and he said his prayer—'" Tim broke off the quotation and finished: "I'm saying a prayer right now to all the gods of luck and war and love that something will happen to straighten out this mix-up!"

"What's the idea?" asked Mary Lou suspiciously. "Going to try to stop us?"

Judy murmured an "Amen," but she had little hope. It would take nothing less than a miracle to turn Vance from Mary Lou and save his army career.

JUDY'S worst forebodings were justified the next day, when Tim rushed over to her house between infantry drill and the noon mess. He was risking a demerit by leaving camp without a permit, but he was too much perturbed to care.

"They're going to elope—to-morrow—Saturday!" he announced, panting with excitement and haste. "Vance told me this morning that after the one-thirty inspection he and Mary Lou are going to Highland Falls, and they'll head from there to Connecticut and get married."

Judy's heart stopped beating for a second. She wished that it would never beat again; but it did. It began pumping madly. Her voice, when she spoke, sounded unfamiliar to her ears. It was a queer, flat voice.

"Then he'll have to resign from the corps," she said.

"Yes!" Tim's face was grave. "No horses, dogs, automobiles, or wives allowed. It's breaking his heart already to leave West Point. When he told me about the elopement, this morning, he looked more like a man about to be executed than a man expecting to be happily married."

"But why does he do it?"

"He can't back out now. He asked her last night. Remember the moon and that infernal band that kept playing love songs? The moon and Mary Lou—what a combination!"

Tim's groan was half envious.

Judy pressed her hands to her eyes to shut out the unwelcome picture. Vance and Mary Lou—that golden June moon — Vance's soft Southern voice drawling love words—Mary Lou in his arms—his lips on hers! Judy gave a little moan of pain.

"We've got to stop them! We've got to!" insisted Tim.

"How?" inquired Judy, dropping her hands and lifting dull eyes to his.

"Maybe you could talk to her," he suggested hopefully.

"It wouldn't do any good."

"But you could try."

"Yes, I could try," Judy said wearily.

"I've got another idea percolating in my head. I don't know whether it will work, but I'll try it, if you have no success with Mary Lou."

Across the Plain floated the call to mess. Tim started off on a run, but turned back for a final word.

"Judy, when you're talking to Mary Lou, let it slip out that you know nothing about Vance's family. You don't, so it's no lie."

"She wouldn't pay any attention."

"But tell her, anyhow. It's important."

Judy went to her guest's room at once, anxious to get done with her unpleasant duty. Mary Lou was taking a noonday nap and her "Come in!" was not cordial.

"Oh, it's you!" she said surveying Judy with cold, dark eyes.

"Yes, I wanted to talk to you."

"Why so chummy all of a sudden?" Mary Lou sank deeper in the chaise longue and closed her eyes. "Can't the confab wait? I'm sleepy."

"No!" Judy's negative was blunt. "I want to talk about this crazy idea of yours of eloping with Vance."

"You've heard?" said Mary Lou, sitting up with a jerk.

"That you're slipping off to Connecticut to-morrow afternoon; but you can't! You mustn't!"

"What are you going to do about it?" Mary Lou's tone was insolent. "Run to your father and tell him to stop us?"

"I'm no tattle-tale," replied Judy, drawing up her straight slender body indignantly.

"No, I don't believe you are," agreed Mary Lou, with patronizing indulgence. "You're not like most girls. Maybe it's because you don't get that way about men."

Judy's laugh, harsh and unmirthful, rang out. So Mary Lou thought she didn't get that way about men!

"EVEN if you did tell your father," Mary Lou went on, "he couldn't stop us. He could make a lot of trouble, but Vance would resign and then marry me. We thought there'd be less fuss, though, if we got married first."

"But he doesn't want to resign—not down in his heart. He loves West Point. He wants a commission in the army. It's his career, his whole life. You could wait, and next June—"

"No, I don't believe in waiting. It's time I was married. I've played around long enough, getting nowhere, and you can never tell about men. They blow hot one day and cold the next. I won't take a chance. Besides, I don't want to spend all my life dragging around army posts. Once Vance is out of this military foolishness, he'll be perfect—just the kind of a husband I want. He has everything—good looks, money, position."

"Do you know that for sure?" inquired Judy, remembering her promise to Tim.

"I didn't ask him, but he's going to take me to Paris for our honeymoon, so he must have money. You yourself said he was the most prominent and popular man at the post."

"I meant in cadet activities. I don't know anything about what he was before he came here."

"That's a good line," Mary Lou sneered, "but you can't spring it this late in the day. I don't believe you. You're a smooth one! I'll bet you want Vance for yourself, in spite of the 'I don't care' bluff you've been throwing."

Judy did not deny the charge. Instead, she made one last attempt to shake Mary Lou's determination.

"Vance will hate you some day," she said warningly, "for destroying his career and ruining his future."

"Hate me?" Mary Lou was incredulous. She rose, walked over to a full-length mirror in the closet door and inspected herself lovingly. "No, he'll never hate me—I'll see to that. I know how to handle men, and he'll be crazier about me than ever once we're married. I'll make him a good wife, and a wife that he can be proud of."

It was no use. Judy left the room abruptly. She was helpless against such conceit and selfishness. She was tired—so tired! She wanted to cry, but tears refused to come. Her eyeballs were on fire. There was an aching tensity in her throat. Rest was impossible.

She paced nervously up and down her room for an hour, perhaps two hours. She had lost count of time.

FROM below came the sound of a man's voice—Vance's—and the ripple of Mary Lou's laughter. The front door slammed behind them. Judy ran to the window and watched them stroll off.

Tim was right. Vance looked anything but a happy bridegroom. His usually gay young face was somber. Mary Lou chattered and wooed him with soft glances, but he answered her with nods and monosyllables. Judy pitied him and pitied herself. She dropped to her knees and let her head rest against the window sill. For a long time she knelt there.

She was on the porch, outwardly calm, when Vance and Mary Lou returned.

"'Lo, Judy!" Vance greeted her cordially, but he avoided her eyes. To Mary Lou he said: "To-morrow at one-thirty. I'll meet you over by the guard tent."

His voice had no animation. He departed hurriedly.

"I didn't tell him that you were in the know," Mary Lou said to Judy, when he was out of hearing. "It would only worry him, and he's bothered enough already. I never saw such a grouch as he was to-day." She sounded a little worried. "He didn't even make a date for to-night. Said he'd have to straighten up some odds and ends."

"Why do you go through with it?" Judy asked her.

"Oh, he'll get over his peeve." Mary Lou shook off her fears. "Lots of men are scared just before they get married."

She sauntered into the house. Judy looked after her despairingly. Was there no way to prevent this mad elopement and persuade Mary Lou to wait until next June? Judy was no longer thinking of herself. It was Vance and his future that occupied her. She loved him enough to want his happiness more than anything else.

That night was the most miserable of Judy's life. She gave up all pretense of gayety, and sat silent and aloof, while Mary Lou laughed and coquetted with two cadets who dropped in with a ukelele. The three of them, Mary Lou and the boys, sang new songs and old songs with care-free fervor:

> You'll be my tootsie wootsie
> In the good old summertime!

"Twang, twangety, twang!" went the ukelele.

At the fifth repetition of this tried and true favorite, Judy rose. She was close to hysteria.

"I'm going to bed," she said, and made her escape without further apology.

"Twang, twangety, twang!"

The ukelele followed her even to her own room and haunted her brief moments of broken sleep.

VANCE'S wedding day. It was Judy's first thought on awaking the next morning. The sun was shining. She noticed it with surprise. Somehow sunshine seemed strangely misplaced in a world so dreary.

She dressed slowly, with numbed fingers. She felt numb all over, as if drained of life. She was dressing for Vance's wedding day! Once she had dreamed of a wedding with swords and roses, herself a bride in misty white, with Vance at her side, no longer in cadet gray, but resplendent in the dress uniform of an army lieutenant. The memory pricked through her torpor.

"Steady, little corporal!"

She said the words aloud. She needed that reminder.

"Miss Judy! Telephone!"

Hilda's shrill voice came up the stairs. It was a welcome interruption.

Judy ran down to find Tim Carley on the wire.

"Did you have any luck with Mary Lou?" he asked.

"No, none at all."

"I argued with Vance half the night, but he's a stubborn devil. Thinks it's a point of honor involved—that since he's got into this, he can't stand Mary Lou up practically at the church."

Judy's last hope died. Somehow she had thought there might be a last minute reprieve. She clutched the telephone stand for support.

"Hello! Hello! You there?" called Tim, alarmed by her silence.

"Yes," she replied dully.

"All right, then—listen! I'll have to try that other idea of mine, and I'll need your help. Are you with me?"

"What is it?"

"I can't tell you now; but here's what I want you to do. Vance is meeting Mary Lou over by the guard tent right after inspection. I want you to be on hand, and to keep them talking there until I come along."

"But I don't understand what good that will do."

"You will later. It's important. Will you promise to hang on to them for me?"

Judy hesitated. It would be torture,

pure and simple, to be on hand when Vance met Mary Lou, to see them leave together, to know that they were going to keep a wedding date.

"It's important," Tim repeated. "You must do this, Judy! It isn't much. You won't have to wait long for me—probably not more than a couple of minutes."

His urgency won. Judy promised to hold the elopers by the guard tent, if humanly possible, until Tim came.

"Fine! See you later. Got to rush now."

Tim hung up, satisfied; but Judy was worried over her promise. What wild scheme did Tim have up his sleeve? Was he going to try some last minute argument on Vance? Or did he want to talk to him and Mary Lou together? Either would be futile.

At a quarter past one Mary Lou came downstairs in traveling suit and hat.

"I'm on my way," she said.

"I'll walk across the Plain with you," announced Judy, pulling on her own hat.

"What's the idea?" Mary Lou's eyes narrowed with suspicion. "Going to try to stop us?"

"I'll see you off," Judy said briefly.

"It isn't necessary."

Judy made no answer, and they walked in silence. From time to time Mary Lou shot curious glances at her unwanted companion. She never fully trusted a member of her own sex.

INSPECTION had just finished when they reached the meeting place, and Vance was waiting there. He, too, appeared surprised and confused to see Judy. Tim was nowhere in sight.

Judy was in a panic. What could she say? What could she do to hold them? She racked her brain for small talk. A new cadet passed by. The plebes—there was a topic.

"Marvelous, isn't it, the way the plebes have improved in the last couple of weeks? They look just like the rest of the corps now."

"It sure is," Vance agreed politely. She must say something else.

"There's one, a boy with blue eyes and a funny turned-up nose—I think he's somebody I knew out in Arizona." Judy was inventing wildly. "Have you happened to meet him?"

"There are lots of fellows with blue eyes and turned-up noses around here. If you could point him out to me—"

"Come on, Vance, let's go places and do things!" interposed Mary Lou, growing impatient at this inane exchange.

"No, wait! There's a plebe now. Maybe that's he." Judy said desperately. Where, where was Tim? "No, I guess I was mistaken. It wasn't the right plebe."

"Well, I guess we'll have to be moving along," said Vance, taking Mary Lou's arm.

"Hey, Vance!"

Tim! Judy gave a little sigh of relief at the sound of his voice behind them.

She turned, then stopped short in surprise. Tim was not alone. Hanging on to his arm was a little motherly, white-haired woman in shabby clothes. She was carrying a huge bundle, wrapped in a newspaper.

"Why, ma!"

Astonishment and delight mingled in Vance's shout as he, too, saw the new arrival.

"Vance, my dear, dear boy!" the old lady said, running to him eagerly.

"He called her 'ma'!" Mary Lou's whisper to Judy was horrified.

"And what is all this?" asked Vance, relieving his guest of her bundle.

"Cookies, dear. I baked them this morning. And there's some cold chicken. I thought maybe you'd like a taste of your old ma's cooking."

"And how!" Vance said enthusiastically. "But come, I want you to meet my best girl." He looked around. "Why, what is it?"

He gasped at Mary Lou's expression. Her face was livid with rage. She wasn't lovely at that moment. Indeed, she was almost ugly.

"I'm not your best girl!" She screamed the words at him. "You've been playing me for a fool, kidding me about Paris honeymoons, making me think you were somebody—and that's your mother! She does her own cooking and baking, and look at her hat!"

THE old lady pulled off the shabby, out-dated headgear. Her gentle face puckered with grief.

Vance looked at Mary Lou as if seeing her for the first time.

"Our engagement is off, I understand," he said in a curiously calm tone.

"I'll say it is! I hope I never see you or any of your hick family again!"

"Mary Lou, how dare you speak like that of Vance's mother?"

Judy was aroused from petrified amazement. She had heard the old lady's choked sob, her frightened words:

"I shouldn't have come!"

That dear, sweet-faced old lady! Judy was at her side.

"There, there!" Judy's strong young arms encircled the bent, grieving figure. She rubbed her smooth cheek, like a kitten, against the wrinkled one. "Why shouldn't you come to see your own son?"

"But he's not my son." The old lady spoke up unexpectedly. "I'm just his old Ma MacNally."

"My second mother," Vance said tenderly.

"What?" Mary Lou whirled.

"My mother is dead," Vance said quietly.

"But why didn't you tell me?"

"You didn't give me a chance."

Mary Lou was speechless before his cold scorn. For once in her self-confident young life she looked ashamed.

The old lady touched Vance's coat sleeve timidly, pleadingly.

"My dear, my dear, I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to do any harm. Timmie came around this morning and said you wanted to see me."

"Did you frame this up?"

Mary Lou flung the question at Tim Carley, who had stood by uneasily.

"I—I—yes, I did!" admitted Tim, speaking to Vance rather than to her.

"To keep me in the corps?" Vance asked quietly.

"Yes—no!" Tim straightened and made his confession bluntly. "I did it because I love Mary Lou, and because you'd never have made her happy. You didn't realy love her. You just idealized her."

"You mean you pulled this trick to get me for yourself?" inquired Mary Lou, peering up at Tim doubtfully.

"Yes!"

In her dark eyes something like respect shone upon him.

"And I thought you slow and dumb!" she said.

"I am; but I love you, Mary Lou!" Tim had forgotten his audience.

"Still? In spite of the way I just acted?"

"In spite of anything or everything. I love you enough to understand. You're a spoiled little girl, but I want to spoil you still more. You want money, leisure, pretty things. I can give them to you. I'll take such good care of you!"

"I guess you do love me." Mary Lou spoke with a new humility. "I'm not worth it, Tim, but—"

Her voice sank to a whisper. Whatever she said, it was enough to illumine Tim's face with joy. He made a little motion as if to take her in his arms, but remembered in time that they were not alone. He remembered, too, that Vance was looking—Vance, who but ten minutes ago had been ready to elope with Mary Lou.

It was not without shame that Tim faced his friend, but his freckled face was set in lines of resolution.

"You'll think I'm a double crosser," he said; "but I can't help it. I'm taking Mary Lou away with me. She says she'll marry me. I was planning to get out of the corps, anyhow. I'm no good as a soldier, and my dad has a job waiting for me in Chicago; so it's good-by." Tim waited for a moment. His eyes scanned Vance's face anxiously and wistfully. "I don't suppose you'd shake hands with me?" he said.

Vance's hand shot out.

"Why not, Tim? It's good-by, good luck—and thanks!"

"Gosh, Vance!"

Tim's voice was husky. The two men shook hands gravely, and then Tim was gone—Tim and Mary Lou.

JUDY dreaded to look at Vance. She was afraid of the hurt and suffering she might find in his gray eyes. His engagement was broken, his best girl had gone off with another man.

"Well, that's over!" Vance's voice sounded natural. He grinned at Judy, and it was his old, familiar grin. "You and I are going to show Ma MacNally around the post," he said; "and then I'll trim you at a set of tennis."

Joy, almost forgotten, stirred in Judy. She could nearly believe that she had been living through a bad dream; yet she dared not hope too much. Vance spoke to her and smiled upon her as in the days before Mary Lou, but perhaps he was pretending. Perhaps his heart was breaking for the other girl, who was now a disappearing speck beyond the Plain.

If so, he hid his suffering well. He coaxed Ma MacNally back to cheerfulness with teasing and laughter. Judy learned how he had first met the old lady. It was three years ago, when he was a lonely plebe. He had come upon her little cottage during one of his hikes through the hills, and had won her eternal gratitude by mending a fence. She had repaid him with home-baked cookies, and they had struck up a lasting friendship.

"It was great to have a mother, even a borrowed one," Vance said, smiling upon the old lady. "You see, I never had one. My mother died when I was born, and my father never forgave me for being on earth when she was gone. He left me down in Kentucky, with servants, and came to New York, where he has lived ever since, working to pile up money and forget."

"But what a miserable time you must have had!" cried Judy, whose heart ached for the lonely little boy that Vance must have been, hated by his father and left to servants.

"It was. That's why I never liked to talk about my home or my family. It

hurt too much. Anyhow"—his gray eyes rested affectionately on Ma MacNally—"I needed a mother, so I just naturally adopted ma."

"No, I adopted him," amended the old lady. "He reminded me of my own beautiful boy who went away to France and—and never came back."

Her wrinkled face grew tender and very sad, but she was smiling when she kissed Vance in farewell.

"Good-by," she said. "I want you to come and see me soon."

"I will," he promised; "and I'll bring Judy along."

The old lady nodded happily.

"That's right—take Judy along wherever you go. She's the girl for you, and don't you forget it!"

Judy's face was rose-tinted with embarrassment. Vance laughed confusedly, but he answered promptly and steadily:

"I won't—never again!"

Judy heard. Suddenly she was happy—happy—happy.

SIDE by side they watched Ma MacNally until she was out of sight. Then, without a word, Vance was piloting Judy toward the shady path so aptly called Flirtation Walk. He found a little nook almost hidden by bushes, and pulled her down to the grass beside him.

For a long time they sat in silence. It was Vance who spoke first.

"Gee, Judy," he said, "there are a lot of things I'd like to say to you, but"—he spoke wistfully—"I suppose it's too soon."

"Too soon? Why?"

"You'll think me a fickle idiot." He sighed regretfully. "I'd better wait."

"No, tell me!" Judy leaned closer to him, deliberately provocative. She had had enough of waiting. "Tell me!"

"Do you think you could understand?"

She nodded, and her sapphire eyes were velvet soft.

"Oh, Judy, I've been such a blind idiot not to have known!"

He stopped.

"Known what?" Judy prompted him.

"That it was you—always you." Vance did not look at her as he said it. "I saw Mary Lou's pretty face, and I thought her everything that was fine and womanly. She looked to be the kind of a person that you really are. I fell for an imitation. To-day, when I saw you with your arms around ma, defending her, comforting her, I knew. I knew that it was you who are soft and gentle and tender. I saw that you were the girl I really loved—the girl who should have been my best girl."

"Should have been?"

Vance looked at her then.

"Judy!" He cried her name doubtfully, hopefully. "You mean—"

"*Is* your best girl!"

"Darling!" Vance drew her to him. His fingers ruffled her bobbed golden hair. His gray eyes, ardent and happy, glowed into hers. His lips were close—dangerously, delightfully close.

"My best girl now," he said softly; "and next June—my own little wife!"

The song had gone over—Victor was a success!

Redeemed by Love

Not until she was his bride did she know that he had married her because—

By Edna Ettinger

Author of "A Spectre from the Past," etc.

HIS vibrant voice, as it came to her over the telephone, told Donna Milford that something of vital importance had happened.

"I'm going on to-night, dear!" he blurted out in a pitch of excitement.

Donna gasped, then quivered with joy. For months she had been hoping and praying for this—the big chance that meant their future happiness; and now it had come at last.

"Oh, Victor!" she cried in a throbbing voice. "I'm so glad I could cry! I know you'll be wonderful!"

"But I'm as nervous as can be. I hope I get over it by to-night. Will you be there, Donna?"

"Of course I will. Don't worry, dear, I'm sure everything will turn out right."

"I hope so," he said prayerfully. "I just received a message telling me that Barrington isn't well, and that

I'm to go on in his place. I've got to hurry along now. They're calling a dress rehearsal for this afternoon."

Donna hung up the receiver with a singing heart. For a long time it had seemed as if Victor Shaw, as understudy to the star of a successful musical comedy, would never get a chance to show what he could do with the leading rôle; but fate had taken a hand, and his big moment had come.

She and Victor had been sweethearts for years, as far back as the time when they went to public school together. He had always had a good voice. As a boy, he sang in the choir and at parties; and in later years, when he worked his way through college, he wrote the college play and sang the leading part. It was that which decided him for a career on the stage.

Donna hurried to the breakfast room, where her mother and her brother, Stewart, were finishing their coffee. She looked adorably pretty with her cheeks flushed and her golden brown eyes dancing with joy.

"Victor is going to sing to-night!" she fairly sang the words.

"That's great!" Stewart exclaimed. "I hope he makes good; but let me tell you, if I had Vic's talent, I'd write plays, instead of trying to be an actor."

"Never mind that now, Stewart," said his mother. She was an attractive woman with a sprinkling of gray in her hair—just an older edition of Donna. "All you've got to do is to dig down in your pocket and get us three good seats."

"I sure will, mother! We'll sit right up front, so that he can see us.

PROMPTLY at half past eight the theater was plunged into darkness and the footlights lit up the stage. There were the usual sounds of rattling programs and people fidgeting in their seats as they made themselves comfortable.

Sitting in the third row, between her mother and her brother, Donna felt herself going hot and cold intermittently. This evening meant so much to her! If Victor was a success, then, as they had often planned, they would be married immediately. As his wife, she felt she would be the happiest girl in the world, for she loved him dearly.

But a dreadful thought crept into her mind—suppose he should fail? A shudder went through her as if an icy hand had touched her heart. No, no, he musn't fail! It would break his heart and Donna's heart.

The curtain was rising. Donna felt a peculiar dryness in her throat, and all her pulses seemed to be beating like mad. She grasped the arms of her chair to steady herself.

Now the opening chorus was over. They were saying something on the stage, but to her the words were meaningless. The chorus was grouping itself as for a star's entrance. There was a shout. Donna stared tensely. That was Victor coming on!

He looked very handsome in his white flannels, with his white silk shirt open at the throat. His dark hair, brushed smoothly back, reflected the light from overhead. His dark eyes sparkled, and his white teeth glistened as he smiled; but Donna could see that underneath his make-up he was deathly pale. Stage fright—the thing he feared the most—had caught him in its toils.

Donna's heart went out to him. She would have given her life to help him, to inspire him with courage and confidence. She tried to send her thoughts across the footlights:

"Go on, Vic! We're with you,

heart and soul. Go on—you can't fail!"

She saw the deathly pallor leave his face. Was it possible that he had seen her and taken courage from her?

Now he was singing. His voice was sweet and strong, and it never wavered. Donna could feel a stillness in the air that meant undivided interest; and the thunderous applause that rewarded his song showed that he had triumphed.

She leaned back in her seat, exhausted, as if by her own spirit she had carried him through the ordeal. Stewart interrupted his applauding to tap her on the hand and say:

"He's great!"

Her mother's eyes were moist. Mrs. Milford loved Victor as if he were her own son, and his triumph was her triumph, too.

During the intermission the stage manager came before the curtain and informed the audience of the star's illness. This evening, he announced, the leading man's part was being played by Victor Shaw.

Such things have happened on Broadway before. Many unknowns have stepped into a star's shoes and scored a sensational success. It meant a glorious future for Victor, who was only twenty-four and had many years of fame and popularity ahead of him.

BACKSTAGE was in an uproar when Donna managed to get by the doorman with Stewart and her mother. She saw Victor in the center of an admiring circle. The men were shaking hands with him and congratulating him. The girls were kissing him.

Stewart elbowed his way through the circle, with his sister and their mother following him.

"I don't have to tell you how glad I am," said Donna's brother, as he shook Victor's hand. "You went over big."

"Thanks," Victor answered. Then, turning to Donna, he kissed her. "I really can't believe it happened," he said. "Oh, were you there too, mother?" He put his arm around her shoulders and kissed her. "This is a great night!"

Others came, crowding the stage, filling every inch of space, and gradually the Milfords were pushed back to the outward edge of the throng; but Donna was very happy. All these people were praising the man she loved. They were lionizing him, and predicting great things for his future. She smiled inwardly. Little did they suspect that she was the one who would share Victor Shaw's future!

Then she saw the circle of admirers give way as Cleo Bennett, the gorgeous golden-haired creature who played opposite Victor, made her way to him. Cleo was indescribably lovely. With big blue eyes, perfect features, and a perfect form, she was considered the most beautiful girl on the stage.

Donna felt a strange fear as Cleo advanced toward Victor. Irresistibly her eyes were drawn to them. She saw Cleo put her lovely white arms around Victor's neck and draw his head down until their lips met. It seemed to Donna that their kiss lasted for ages.

"You were marvelous, Victor!" Cleo said, with a warm glow in her fascinating eyes. "Howland"—that was the producer's name—"wants to celebrate, and I suggested my apartment. We'll just have a few friends there—not too many. Howland left to take care of the refreshments, and I promised to bring you right over." She took hold of his arm possessively.

Donna had a horrid sinking feeling as she saw them walking off.

"Oh, say!" Stewart cried out, when he realized what was happening. "You ought to go with him, Donna! I'll bet he's forgotten you are here. I'll remind him."

She held out her hand and stopped her brother.

"Don't, Stewart! This is his big night, and he ought to have it all to himself."

"Silly!" Stewart exclaimed. "He ought to be glad to share it with you."

Stewart was very fond of Donna. Although she had recently celebrated her twentieth birthday, and he was only three years older, he still called her his "kid sister," and considered himself as more or less her guardian.

"Come on," Stewart added, as he took her arm, "or we'll miss him."

Donna refused to move.

"Please be quiet, Stewart," she whispered. "You're attracting attention. We'll see him in the morning. Let's go home, mother."

DONNA tried hard to conceal the hurt that was in her heart, and to disguise the incredulous look in her eyes. Why, it was unbelievable that Victor should desert her in his hour of triumph! How often they had pictured this very scene!

"We'll slip away," Victor had said, "and we'll celebrate—just we two."

And now that the long-hoped-for moment had arrived, he had gone off with Cleo Bennett!

Donna tried to make excuses for him. He was not himself. The excitement, the thrill, the back slapping, the handshaking, had put him into a daze. He probably didn't know what he was doing.

But he had seen her, he had kissed her—how could he forget her? She buried her face in the pillow and cried. Somewhere, basking in Cleo's smiles, he was celebrating. He was happy, while she was spending the most miserable night of her life.

She tried to be very cheerful the next morning. She hoped that Victor would realize his mistake and hurry over to her house to ask her forgiveness. Of course she would forgive him. Girls always forgive the men they love.

The hands of the clock met at noontime, but there was no sign of Victor. He had not even called her on the telephone. Perhaps the celebration did not break up until the late hours of the morning, and he was still sleeping. It wouldn't be fair to wake him. She had better wait.

She was very thankful that her mother did not mention Victor, for she might have broken down and cried; but she knew that Mrs. Milford's thoughts were the same as hers.

The afternoon hours dragged interminably. Donna's mother was purposely avoiding her, afraid that their eyes might meet. A hundred times the girl went to the window, hoping that she would see Victor coming up the street.

Then, at five o'clock, the telephone rang. She hesitated to answer it. If it wasn't Victor—

But it was, and he sounded very happy.

"I'll be over in fifteen minutes," he promised.

Donna called to her mother and told her the good news.

"We'll give him Stewart's place at the table, mother," she said. "He'll be the guest of honor to-night. Mind if I don't help? I want to go up to my room for a few minutes."

"Go right ahead, dear."

It was a rejuvenated Donna who sat down before the mirror of her dressing table. The sound of Victor's voice had set her blood tingling. It brought color to her cheeks and luster to her eyes. She smoothed the bob of her dark brown hair and added a touch of powder to her nose. Then she stood up and surveyed her slender form in the mirror.

She lacked Cleo's breath-taking beauty. Hers was of a sweeter and more wholesome type—not the kind that would fire a man's imagination, carry it to a white heat, and then die, but the kind that reflects character and becomes dearer as time advances.

She pushed yesterday's incident from her mind. This was going to be her day. They would have dinner together; then she could depend upon Stewart and her mother to go to the pictures, leaving her and Victor alone. In the living room where they had often planned their future, they would now take definite steps to make their dreams come true.

She greeted Victor with open arms. He kissed her and gave her a little hug.

"I still feel as if it was all a dream," he said.

She tried to take his hat, but he held it back.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I can only stay a few minutes. Cleo is waiting for me downstairs in her car."

Donna stepped back as if he had slapped her face.

"We had a little party last night," he continued. "Howland was there, and he told me to come over to his office to-day at half past five. He's going to give me a contract to star in a new show next season with Cleo. Isn't that great? I knew you'd be glad to hear it, so I came over to tell you."

She nodded her head slowly. Words wouldn't come. This wasn't the Victor she knew. This was some one else—some one who was drunk with success.

"You should have heard my telephone this morning," he added. "I must have received a hundred calls. I don't know when I'll be able to go to all the places I was invited to; but I'll drop around to see you some night, just as soon as I can."

There sounded the loud honking of a horn in the street.

"That must be Cleo," he said. "I'll have to run along now." He kissed Donna's cold lips. "By, by, dear."

She turned around with feet like lead. Her mother stood before her, and, like a little child, she went to the refuge of that understanding heart. She cried against her mother's bosom.

Mrs. Milford did not speak, but her lips formed the words:

"A good boy spoiled! Well, I guess all of them can't take success like Lindbergh."

IN three weeks Donna saw Victor just three times, and then his talk concerned himself only. The star had gone to Palm Beach to recuperate, and Victor was finishing the season in the leading rôle. He told Donna of the fine new friends he had made; of the "mash" notes he had received from girls who thought they had fallen in love with him; of Cleo Bennett, and what a great help she had been to him.

Donna listened meekly. She had too much pride to remind him of his promise to her—that they would be married as soon as he became a success.

His picture was in all the newspapers now—usually with Cleo. Once,

when he was in her car, she was arrested for speeding. This being her second offense, she was fined fifty dollars.

"She'll kill herself some day," Stewart remarked. "She's a born speed nut. Victor ought to keep out of her car. Why don't you tell him so, Donna?"

Donna wasn't listening. She was trying to put up a bold front, but her heart was breaking. She realized that Victor was drifting farther and farther away from her. She was afraid, too, that he was falling in love with Cleo. The leading woman was of a type that could fascinate any man. Donna didn't believe that Cleo loved him at all. He was just a new interest to her. He was in the limelight and by being with him she could share some of it.

His visits to the Milfords were becoming fewer and fewer. Soon, Donna feared, he would stop coming entirely. Then what would she do?

She told her brother of pretended telephone messages received from Victor. She felt that she had to defend her recreant lover, because Stewart was saying bitter things about him, calling him a traitor and an ingrate.

Weeks passed. The season had ended, and Victor's new show was in rehearsal. Donna was home alone one evening. Her mother had asked her to go to the pictures, but she had refused. Those happy endings left her sad instead of cheerful.

She heard a key turned in the door. It couldn't be possible that her mother was back from the pictures so soon! The door opened, and Stewart came in, followed by Victor.

Donna looked at them in surprise. It was a long time since she had seen the two together, although in former days they had always been good friends.

Stewart came to her with a wide smile on his face.

"I'm going to be the first to kiss the bride," he announced.

Donna was bewildered as he took her in his arms and kissed her soundly. Her heart pounded against her ribs. Could it be possible that Victor had come to claim her? Had his love for her returned? Were their dreams going to come true after all?

She blushed as she pushed Stewart away.

"Is this a joke?" she asked half-heartedly.

"Not on your life!" Stewart declared. "Get your things. We're going to take a run up to Greenwich and change your name to Mrs. Victor Shaw!"

"Oh, Victor!" Donna cried, as she ran to him and hugged him. "I'm so glad!"

He held her in his arms and kissed the lips she offered him; but he seemed strangely silent and reserved. She wondered if it could be because he thought marriage such a serious thing. She took hold of his arm and pressed it to her breast.

"You're the darlingest man in the world!" she told him.

SHE could forgive him for everything, now. All her heartache was forgotten, and so were all the nights that she had cried herself to sleep. She was gloriously happy. Victor loved her and was going to make her his wife!

"But we ought to wait for mother," she suggested. "She'll be back from the movies in about an hour and a half."

"No, no!" Stewart said with fi-

nality. "We're going right now. We're going to spring it as a surprise on mother."

"But—"

Stewart put his hand over her lips.

"You do as I tell you," he said, "or I'll carry you out of the house like a sack of potatoes!"

"Are you sorry you married me?" Donna asked brokenly. "What good would that do?" he returned brutally

She protested, but in vain. Stewart bundled her into her coat, clapped her hat on her head, and forced her out of the house with Victor.

"But how will mother know what happened to me?" Donna asked.

Stewart took a card and a pencil from his pocket.

"I'll scribble a note and leave it for her."

They crowded into the seat of the roadster. Victor was at the wheel, and Donna snuggled close to him.

They talked very little, but Donna didn't mind it one bit. She was happy with her thoughts. What a wonderful thing life was! She planned a thousand things. They would get a home right next to her mother's. She would drive Victor to the theater every day and return in the evening to take him home. Wouldn't mother be surprised when she found Stewart's note? Perhaps Donna shouldn't have done it without notice; but dear old mother, she would forgive her daughter, for she had always liked Victor.

Stewart had assumed the rôle of manager. He knew just where to take

them. He was the best man and the witness at the marriage ceremony.

"I'll go home now," he said, after it was over. "I'll have mother make a nice dinner for you for to-morrow." He kissed Donna. "The best of luck, honey!" Then he shook hands with Victor. "You're getting a wonderful girl. If I could find another like her I'd get married to-morrow."

Donna thrilled with pride as she took Victor's arm. He was her husband now, and she was happy to put her future in his hands. She loved him with every drop of blood that was in her.

PRESENTLY they were alone in their suite of rooms in a hotel. Victor sank down in a chair and lit a cigarette. Donna turned from the mirror, where she had been smoothing her hair, and glanced at him with an embarrassed look.

Victor was staring at the floor. He had a tense look which she had often seen on his face when he was trying to solve some problem. Walking over to him timidly, and seating herself on the arm of his chair, she put her hand on his shoulder.

"Dearest!"

He did not look up. He didn't seem to be aware of her presence.

"Victor!" she whispered. "You—you frighten me. What's the matter?"

He got up from the chair and walked over to the window. She looked at him with startled eyes. What had come over him? She had expected him to take her in his arms, the moment they were alone, and tell her how dearly he loved her; but he seemed cold and aloof.

Fear clutched at her heart, and the words trembled on her lips.

"Are you sorry you married me?"

He turned from the window and stared at her.

"What good would that do?" he asked brusquely.

His manner and tone chilled her. What did he mean? Why was he looking at her so harshly?

"I don't understand," she said, a little unsteady on her feet. "Then why did you come to the house for me, and why did you bring me here?"

"Ask Stewart to-morrow," her new husband answered. "He'll tell you."

He turned his head and looked out of the window again.

A shiver went through her. She steeled her courage and went over to him. Taking hold of the lapels of his coat, she looked straight into his eyes.

"I'll not wait until to-morrow," she said firmly. "I want to know now. What has Stewart to do with our marriage?"

"Well, he was the one who forced it."

"Forced it?" she repeated.

"Yes," he said coldly. "Stewart threatened to kill me if I didn't marry you."

Her hands dropped from his coat. For a moment the room seemed to reel before her eyes. She bit her lips and steadied herself. Now she understood why he had been so silent in the house and during the trip!

Her voice was little above a whisper as she said:

"Then you didn't marry me because you loved me? You don't care for me at all?"

He couldn't answer her. He couldn't honestly say that he didn't love her or didn't care for her; but there was Cleo, with those soft white arms and those moist kisses, and there were all the other friends he had just made. There was that new

life that was open to him now, the life of pleasure and luxury. Wherever he went he was wined and dined. Freedom meant so much to him, and marriage would put an end to it. Alone, he was welcome at all the parties, but with a wife he would find himself omitted. A quiet evening at the fireside had no appeal for him now. He wanted the wild, hilarious gayety of the bright lights.

Donna's pleading eyes were turned to him. She was hoping against hope that his better side would be the master, that the tense look on his face would be displaced by a smile, that he would gather her in his arms and tell her that he loved her; but he refused to meet her eyes. He refused to open his lips.

Without a word the bride went to the closet for her hat and coat.

"Where are you going?" Victor asked suspiciously.

"Home," she replied, "where I'm welcome."

"Remember I'm not sending you away. You're going of your own accord. I don't want Stewart to come gunning after me!"

She could hardly believe that this was the man she had loved for years—the man who had spoken so eagerly of becoming a success for her sake, and had painted such beautiful pictures of their future together.

How small he was now! He seemed to shrink before her eyes. What she once thought was sterling character was nothing but cheap dross.

"Don't worry!" she said bitterly. "Stewart won't come after you. He must have been mad to do this in the first place. I would never have agreed to it. You're not the man I loved. I hate you now. I never want to see you again. Go to your new friends and stay with them. Don't ever come back to me!"

She slammed the door as she rushed out of the room. Her mind was like a whirlpool. She didn't wait for the elevator. She ran down the stairs. She couldn't get away quickly enough.

DONNA went back to New York by train. She glanced at the small gold band that Victor had given her, and tore it from her finger. She was tempted to throw it away. Instead, she dropped it in her bag. What a short, miserable married life!

When she reached her home she found that in the hurry of her departure she had forgotten her key. She would have to ring the bell and awaken Mrs. Milford. Too bad! She wanted to spare her mother this new trouble until to-morrow.

A sudden light in the foyer told her that they had heard her ring. The door was opened, and Stewart and Mrs. Milford stood before her in their dressing gowns. Donna couldn't control herself any longer. With a pitiful cry she ran to her mother and burst into tears.

"Where's Victor?" Stewart demanded.

"Let her alone," his mother admonished him, as she led Donna to the living room. "Something must have happened. We'll wait until she's ready to talk." Then she stroked Donna's head. "Don't worry, dear! You were always my little girl, and you always will be."

The sobs became fewer and fewer. Donna wiped her tears.

"I'm sorry I broke down that way," she said.

"Did he send you home?" Stewart demanded.

"No," she sighed. "I ran away from him. Oh, Stewart, why did you do it? Why didn't you tell me the truth?" She grasped her mother's arm. "Oh, mother, Stewart forced him to marry me!"

"What?" her mother exclaimed.

"He did, he did!" Donna cried. "He threatened to kill Victor if he didn't marry me. When I found it out, I left him. I couldn't live with him if he didn't love me any more."

"Of course not," her mother answered firmly. "Were you crazy, Stewart, to do a thing like that?"

"Please, mother, you don't understand. I'm sure that Victor loves Donna. Of course, he's changed since he became successful, but at heart I think he's all right. It's that new crowd he's got in with. They're flattering him and turning his head. I didn't intend to kill him, but I guess I put up a pretty good bluff, and he thought I actually meant it. I felt that if they were married, he'd be saved from that rotten crowd. I honestly believed that once they were married, he'd be the same Victor we've always known. I never dreamed that he would let her go. I believe I could—"

"You'll not go near him," Donna interrupted fiercely. "Do you hear me? I don't want to see him again. I don't want to have anything to do with him!"

Her mother put a protective arm about her.

"Trust me, dear. Stewart meant well, but it was wrong, and he shan't do any more. You were right to come back. This is your home, and we want you here."

"Perhaps I should have given him a good beating first," Stewart said. "It might have knocked some sense into him."

"You'll leave him alone!" Donna cried. "Do you hear me?"

"All right!" Stewart shrugged his shoulders. "I'm through."

LIFE was a trial to Donna after that. There was nothing to look forward to, nothing to hope for, nothing to dream of. Victor never called her up. Apparently it did not matter much to him whether she got home safely or not. Probably he was glad, she thought, to have got out of the marriage so easily. It would ease his conscience to think that she had deserted him.

She tried to wipe the memory of him from her mind, but it was impossible. His name or his picture was always cropping up in the newspapers. She read the criticisms when he opened in his new show; and, even though she still said that she hated him, she was glad that they were favorable. Cleo was sharing stellar honors with him, and their names were linked together in Broadway gossip, rumoring an expected engagement.

Stewart came tearing into the house one day with excitement written all over his face.

"Well, Vic got his!" he gloated. "I guess he's through now!"

Donna sensed that something dreadful must have happened.

"What is it, Stewart?" she asked timidly.

"Remember the time Vic was in Cleo's car when they were arrested for speeding? Well, I told you then that she was a speed nut, and that she'd get into a real accident some day."

"Oh, stop beating around the bush!" Donna cried. "Tell me what has happened!"

"Well," he said calmly, "our little friend Cleo was traveling at sixty-five

miles an hour, and she smashed into a truck."

Donna felt her heart stop.

"She's in the hospital now," Stewart continued, "with a broken arm and some bad bruises; but Vic got the worst of it. He went right through the wind shield. Broke his collar bone and got some bad cuts. His throat was slashed, and the papers say he'll never be able to sing again; so that's the end of the matinée idol!"

Donna's head seemed to sway from side to side as if she had no control of it. Her eyes became painfully large, her mouth opened in fright, and she wrung her hands nervously.

"He—he's—dead?" she stammered.

"No, he'll pull through, but his career is ended."

"Oh!" Donna sighed with relief. "Where is he now, Stewart? I must go to him."

"What?" Her brother looked at her with unbelieving eyes. "You want to go to him, after the rotten deal he gave you?"

"But I must, Stewart! He's in trouble. He needs me now. Don't you understand? With his career gone, what is there left for him? He'll be friendless, and—well, I used to love him."

"That's over," Stewart said grimly. "He chose his own bed—let him lie in it. We'll see what his fine friends do for him now. I used to like Vic myself, but after the dirty way he treated you I have no more use for him."

"But that's gone and forgotten," she said. She realized now that men are more revengeful and unforgiving than women. "We must remember the time when we were friends. We've known Victor all our lives, and we can't desert him now."

Stewart turned on her angrily.

"Haven't you any pride? Where's your backbone? He hasn't called you up once since the night he married you, and still you're ready to go up to the hospital and hold his hand as if he were the nicest chap in the world. Well, you're not going. I won't let you make a fool of yourself!"

Pride? What was pride worth when her heart was crying out for Victor? She had thought she hated him, but this terrible hour brought back all the old love. She couldn't stifle it. Until her dying day she would love him. Why deny it? Her love was stronger than herself.

She clenched her fists and stood erect before Stewart. There was a look in her eyes that he had never seen before. Joan of Arc must have looked so when she addressed the soldiers of France. It was an inspired look.

"I'm going to him," she said slowly, "because I love him!"

Stewart nodded his head, as if under a spell.

"All right!" His voice was low. "I'll go with you. I'm sure they won't let us in to-day, so we'll go there the first thing in the morning." He put his hand on his sister's shoulder tenderly. "I'm sorry for what I said, Donna. I didn't understand."

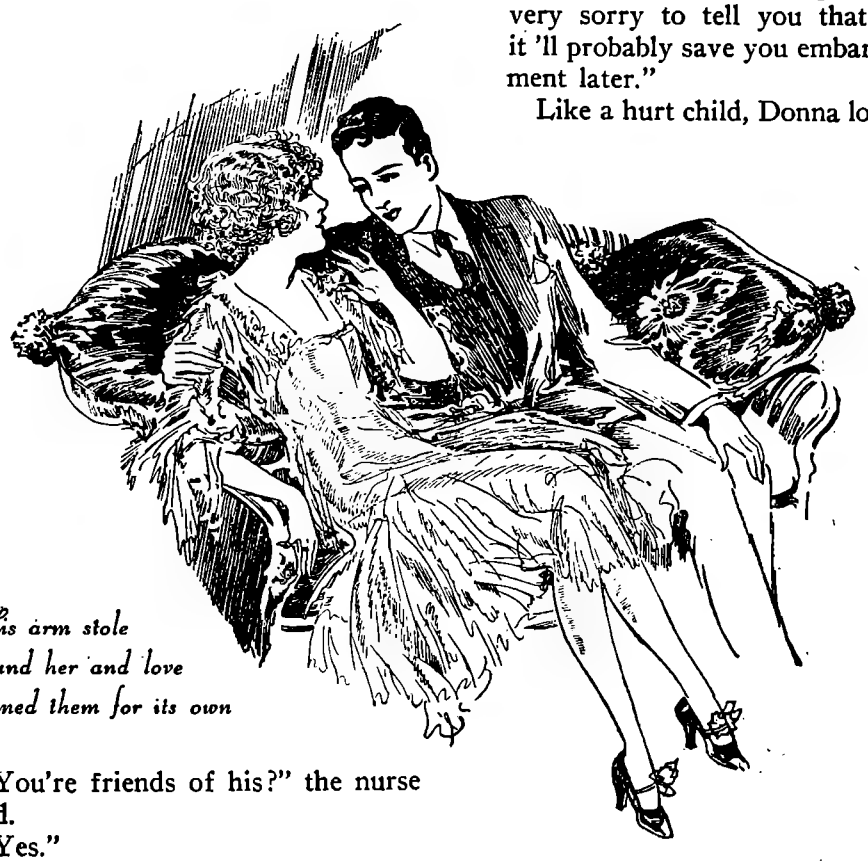
THE next morning Donna left the house with Stewart. They rode up to the hospital in silence. It was all a revelation to Stewart. To read of a great love is one thing, but to see it is like eavesdropping at some sacred and secret ceremony.

They reached the hospital, and he inquired for Victor's room. A nurse in starched white stopped him at the door.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but we're

not permitting any one to come in except near relatives."

"I guess we're more than that," Stewart said. "I'm sure that if the patient knew we were here he'd want to see us."



His arm stole around her and love claimed them for its own

"You're friends of his?" the nurse asked.

"Yes."

"I'm sorry. If you'll come back at the end of the week, you'll be able to see him."

"But we want to see him now," Stewart argued. "Just tell him that Donna and Stewart are here. I'm sure he'll want us to come in."

They finally prevailed upon the nurse to go in and ask Victor.

She returned in no time at all. Her eyes were cold.

"He doesn't want to see you," she said.

Donna stepped forward.

"That's not possible. Did you tell him who we were?"

"Yes; and I'd advise you not to come again, because he told me never to let you in. He seemed annoyed to hear that you were at the hospital. I'm very sorry to tell you that, but it 'll probably save you embarrassment later."

Like a hurt child, Donna looked up at Stewart. Was she hearing right? Was it true that Victor refused to see her even now? Had he gone out of her life completely? Couldn't he even bear the sight of her?

Stewart put his arm around her and led her down the corridor. He couldn't think of anything to say to comfort her. In the taxi, she lay in the circle of her brother's arm like a little wounded creature. Tears rolled down her cheeks and dropped on her dress. He said nothing, but tightened his grip

on her to assure her of his love and protection.

WEEKS passed. Victor came out of the hospital. His picture in the newspaper showed that outwardly he had not changed, with the exception of a scar on his right cheek; but his voice was gone, the printed story said. He would never sing again, although he could talk. He was leaving the city for Palm Beach. The paper also stated that Cleo Bennett would resume her part in the show within another week.

Donna was thankful that neither Stewart nor her mother ever mentioned Victor's name. Life went along as usual.

The world does not stop because of broken hearts.

A month after Victor left New York he was completely forgotten on Broadway. New celebrities had taken his place. Broadway worships successes only, and its memory is short.

But Donna could not forget him. The scene at the hospital could never be erased from her mind. That sinking feeling, the sudden darkness into which she had dropped, made her shudder every time she thought of it. To be unwelcome at his sick bed was a cruel blow.

Stewart brought her many books, but she couldn't concentrate on reading. She developed a peculiar listlessness. Her appetite was gone. She had no desire to go out and mingle with young people, and she cared for neither pictures nor plays. She just sat in her room alone, staring at the walls.

"If only we had money," her mother said to Stewart one day, "I'd send her to Europe to get her far away from here. I'm very much worried about her. She's losing weight and wasting away. It's more than a year now. What a horrible year!"

"Listen, mother!" Stewart said. "I've been very lenient with her, but I think I'll put my foot down now. I'll make her go out with me, even if I have to carry her. There's a new show opened, 'Indifference,' and I hear it's a big hit. I'm going to take her to see it."

Donna didn't want to go. She felt that there was no room for joy in her life any more. Besides, the sight of a theater and a stage would bring back poignant memories of Victor. She wished that she was different, that she was capable of more than one love. Other girls lost their sweethearts and found happiness in the arms of another. Why must she go through life with a bruised heart?

Stewart was persistent, however, and she yielded. Never had she known him to be so talkative as he was during the ride in the taxi; but she could see through his kindly artifice. He was trying to put her in a happy frame of mind, so that she would enter the theater with a light heart.

THE lobby of the theater was crowded. "Indifference" had been acclaimed by all the critics as the outstanding hit of the season. They predicted that it would remain on Broadway for at least two years. The author was an unknown named Henry Borno.

As they made their way through the crowd in the lobby, Stewart looked for familiar faces. Suddenly he turned to Donna and spoke quickly and excitedly. He became almost rough as he elbowed his way up to the ticket taker. He pushed Donna ahead of him, offered his tickets, and entered.

They were ushered to their seats. Donna took the program and glanced through it, while Stewart pretended to read his. Donna noticed that he seemed very much upset, but he assured her that it was nothing at all.

He didn't dare to tell her that he had seen Victor in the lobby. So he had come back to New York, eh? He might have been back for a long time, too.

What an uncanny coincidence! This was the first time Stewart had taken his sister out, and of all the people in the world Victor Shaw was the last one he wanted to see. He was glad he had managed to get Donna into the theater without having her see her lost lover and husband. She might have broken down. Stewart must be very careful when they left. Under his breath he swore at Victor. Why the deuce did the fellow have to come to this theater on this very night?

Donna settled herself in her seat. All around her were eager, happy faces. Why shouldn't she be happy, too? Why should she permit her thoughts to torture her? She was going to forget the past and think of the present only.

The show was very good. It was a slice of life with tears and laughter—a real human document. When it ended, Stewart helped Donna with her coat, and, instead of going out by the main entrance, chose one that emptied into a side street. A taxi was close by, and he hurried Donna into it.

Originally he had not intended to take her straight home. He had planned to go to a night club, where they would dance; but he was afraid that he might have the bad luck to run into Victor again.

When the taxi stopped in front of the house, Stewart helped his sister out and then paid the driver. Donna was surprised when she saw the door open and her mother standing there.

"You shouldn't have waited up for us, mother," the girl said.

"That's all right. I spent a rather pleasant evening. Will you go to the store for me, Stewart, and get some cake? I have some tea ready for you."

"I'll go with him," Donna suggested.

"No, dear, you stay with me. It's chilly out."

"Oh, why bother about cake?" Stewart said. "Let's have some crackers and jam."

"You never refused me when you were a little boy," his mother reminded him.

"All right, mother — I'm sorry. Shall I get some buns?"

"No. I want a real nice cake—something very good."

"You must have been sharpening your sweet tooth," he teased her. "I've a good mind to buy you one of those five-story wedding cakes."

"If you do," she smiled, "I guess we'll have to eat it."

Stewart turned down the street, while Donna and her mother entered the house.

"Don't bother taking your things upstairs," Mrs. Milford said. "Just drop them in the living room. I must hurry into the kitchen before the tea water boils over."

DONNA stopped on the threshold, and unconsciously her hand went to her heart. She felt a peculiar unsteadiness in her knees. For a long time she stared at the man who was standing at the other end of the room. She couldn't believe her eyes. Victor! What was he doing here?

Deep regret was stamped on his

face. His eyes were pleading. He came toward Donna very slowly, as if he feared she would run away. Then he dropped to his knees at her feet.

He wasn't ashamed of being there at her feet. He wouldn't have cared if the whole world saw him. He knew her real worth, and on his knees he had come to beg her forgiveness.

Donna was stunned. Her heart told her that he had come back with a clean heart and a clean soul—not the spoiled Victor of his days of triumph, but the Victor she had always loved, the one man in this world for her.

She touched his head and dropped to her knees beside him. He took her hand and raised it to his lips.

"I can scarcely hope," he said softly, "that we could ever be the same to each other; but if you'll only let me make up for my unfortunate mistakes, I might have a little peace."

Her heart went out to him. He looked as if he, too, had suffered.

"Victor!" Her lips trembled. "I still love you, and if you want me—"

"Want you?" he cried. "I want you more than anything in this world! Oh, Donna, I never thought you'd take me back!"

Now they were in each other's arms, laughing and crying, supremely happy to have found each other again.

"Let's get up before some one sees us," Donna said, realizing their unconventional position.

He helped her to her feet, put his arms around her, and crushed her to him. He sought her lips and kissed them hungrily and passionately.

"Oh, Donna, Donna!" he cried in an ecstasy of happiness.

In the shelter of his arms, she sat on the couch, listening to his plans for the future.

"We'll go to Europe for our honeymoon," he planned.

She looked at him in surprise.

"Oh, I have plenty of money," he told her. "I have a play running on Broadway now. Perhaps you heard of it—'Indifference.' I wrote it when I was down at Palm Beach. I didn't use my name as the author, for I didn't want that old bunch to come flocking around me as soon as they learned I had money again. What a rotten bunch they were! They forgot me completely after the accident."

"Then why did you refuse to see Stewart and me at the hospital?"

"How could I?" he returned. "Please give me credit for some manhood. After treating you so abominably, how could I look you in the face? I was so ashamed of myself I wished I had died. I went down to Palm Beach and slaved on that play. I wanted to make money—not for myself, but for you. I dared not hope that you would take me back, but I felt that since you were my wife, you'd have to let me provide for you. I hoped to atone for my mistakes that way."

"You never could that way, dearest," she said; "but you can with your love!"

"You make it much easier for me, my sweet, because I'll never have as much money as I have love for you!"

Stewart came into the living room when they were kissing for the hundredth time.

"Well!" he exclaimed in astonishment—and dropped the cake.

Oh, the thrill of belonging to him, of knowing he cared!

Frat Pins for Rent

When Jean wore a borrowed frat pin to arouse his interest, she little thought what the consequences would be

By Donna Ashworth

Author of "Her Happiest Christmas"

"OH, Jean, I want to borrow five dollars!" Harold Rich, a tall, lean boy of seventeen came dashing down the walk after his sister. "I want to take Beth to the dance to-night, and I'm broke!"

"I have just five dollars, Harold." Jean turned to face him, her golden red hair curling in tight little ringlets about her lovely youthful face, her blue eyes shining with hidden excitement. "And I'm going to spend it right now.

You'll just have to stay at home from the dance to-night."

"Oh, please, Jean!"

"Harold, I will not." She spoke emphatically. "You haven't paid me back that five dollars you borrowed from me the other time, and you're too young to be going to the country club dances, anyway."

"Stingy! T i g h t w a d!" Harold turned from her bitterly. "Just because you're nineteen, you don't need to think you're a thousand. All the kids go out there; you know they do! I'll get even with you some way. Just watch and see if I don't."

"Don't do anything desperate!" Jean taunted him as she moved down the street, her head erect. Slim—she was, straight as a young pine tree, and on this warm June afternoon she looked like the very spirit of summer.

Her dress was of soft white silk, and with it she wore a jaunty green tie. White shoes and hose and a white silk hat, which she carried in her hand, completed her costume.

Smiling a little to herself, she turned in at a walk that led to a large white square house back in the trees.

"Oh, Sue," she called out when she reached the porch. Opening the door, she spoke again, "Sue, are you home?"

"Yes, I'm upstairs. Come on up," a laughing voice answered her. Still smiling, Jean ran up the stairs and a moment later dropped down on Sue Gray's window seat.

"I want to make a bargain with you, old dear," Jean announced swiftly.

"All right, go ahead."

Sue, a slim, dark girl with a mass of black shining hair, snappy brown eyes and a wide laughing mouth, was seated before her dressing table, busily adding rouge to her dusky cheeks.

"Well, you know you said at school that you used to rent your frat pins out to the girls who wanted to get a fellow interested in them, that you had a half a dozen or so, and you rented one to Gladys last summer, and Mabel, and I don't know how many more. Well, I want to rent one!"

"You want to rent one!" Sue turned to her in amazement. "What's on your mind now? Tell me! Is it Tommy?"

Color flooded Jean's face. Why did she have to blush like that? But after all, why deny it?

"Yes, it is, Sue, and I know he doesn't care two whoops about me, but I'm crazy about him! I thought if I wore a pin, you know, and pretended as if somebody at school had given it to me, that he might be more interested."

"It has worked more than once, Jean, but I didn't think you'd stoop to that sort of pretense. You've always been so independent!"

"Independent!" Jean laughed a little breathlessly. "That's all right when you're not in love. And you know Tommy is such a dear."

AN hour later Jean, with a Sigma Nu fraternity pin firmly fastened on her white dress, walked slowly home, thinking. The boys had always liked her, but she had never in her life had anybody who really cared. Sue had been engaged six times already.

Last year at college she had hoped that somebody would really care, that some fraternity man would like her well enough to give her a pin. While she had gone to dances, and had laughed a good deal, she could not escape that aching loneliness of not being really wanted.

And Tommy was different from

anybody she had ever known in her life. He was the new cashier of the bank and had come in the spring while she was away. She had met him at the country club dance two weeks earlier, and since then he had been giving her the most wonderful rush she had ever had in her life.

She was thrilled at the very sight of him. He was so lean and dark and handsome, with a funny little sidewise smile, and a twinkle in his blue eyes. He had a way of looking at one as if they were the only thing in the world that really mattered.

If he only really felt that way!

But Dorothy Miner had come back home from school at the same time she did, and Dorothy was interested in him too. And she had a way of getting everything she wanted. She had a car of her own, and her father was president of the bank in which Tommy worked. That was one thing in her favor. He would feel a sense of obligation toward her.

At school Dorothy had had everything. She had been in the best sorority, had been engaged to the most eligible man, and she was queen of the annual.

But she wasn't going to have Tommy, not if Jean could help it! The frat pin might help. If Tommy thought somebody else wanted her, maybe he would want her too.

She must imagine how the person looked who gave her the pin, and he must have a name. Rupert would be a good one, because there wasn't any Rupert in college, and Dorothy couldn't possibly deny anything she might say. He would be dark and handsome, like John Gilbert, and he would be rich, too, and just crazy about her.

Tommy would think if a man like that wanted her, she must be worth having.

Smiling a little, she went up the walk home. She must tell mother about that. It was too good to keep all to herself.

FIFTEEN minutes later she finished telling the story to her mother.

"So, I paid Sue five dollars for the pin, and I'm going to make Tommy think I have a prince charming from afar. The darling won't know that I never had a proposal in my life, and that it is all make believe, but maybe it will make me more desirable. You know the girl that the other fellows want is twice as desirable as the one they don't care anything about."

That night Jean dressed for the dance, humming a tune as she pirouetted back and forth before the mirror. She was unaware of a car stopping out in front and of heavy steps on the walk. Also, she was unaware of the two male voices on the front porch.

"Hello." Tommy Adkins laughed as he came up the steps to find Harold lounging in the hammock. "Aren't you going to the dance?"

"I was," Harold looked up with a frown, "but I'm broke. I tried to borrow five dollars from Jean, and she wouldn't loan it to me. I can't take a girl to the country club without a car and enough money to eat on afterward. I'm furious at Jean. She's the most selfish girl I know!"

"Oh, Harold, I wouldn't be too hard on her." Tommy laughed, as he lounged back in the porch swing. "Maybe she had a use for that five dollars."

"She did!" The boy sat up erect, malice in his eyes. "Do you want to know what she did with it? She wouldn't tell me, but I heard her telling

mother, and she didn't know I heard. She went over to Sue Gray's and paid her five dollars for a frat pin to wear this summer! Sue certainly makes some easy money off of these silly girls, renting her frat pins. She has about half a dozen and she rents them for five dollars a season. Girls haven't any sense!"

"But what on earth would Jean want with a frat pin?" Tommy looked at him in surprise.

"She said she wanted it to impress you, to make you think she was engaged to somebody she met at school. She figured you'd be crazier about her if you thought somebody else wanted her. Jean's never been engaged in her life, but she wants to pretend she has been. Aren't girls funny?"

"I'll give you that five dollars, Harold." Tommy was fumbling in his pocket. "You dash out and get your girl, go on to the dance and have a good time." He handed the astounded boy a five-dollar bill and watched him disappear inside the house whistling.

"Oh, here you are!"

Jean was standing in the lighted doorway, laughing a little. How lovely she was, her head erect, her golden red hair gleaming in the light, her eyes shining, her scarlet lips parted in a smile.

She was wearing an exquisite frock of white taffeta with a close fitting bodice, long full skirt that reached her ankles, and a single silver rose on the shoulder.

"I'm sorry you had to wait."

"I haven't been waiting long." He held out his hands to her. "Aren't we pretty to-night?"

For one second his eyes rested on the jeweled fraternity pin which nestled so close to her heart. Harold had been right after all.

"Why, what's all this?" He fingered the pin suddenly. "Is there somebody else?"

"Why, yes, of course." Jean laughed a little nervously as she drew her green and silver shawl about her. "But shall we go?"

Gayly, Tommy's arm against her own, she went down the walk to where his sedan was parked at the curb.

SHE hadn't expected him to see the pin at once, and yet she was filled with a little thrill of delight that he should have noticed.

"Who is he, Jean?" Tommy looked down at her as the car slipped out over the highway in the moonlight.

"Who is who?" she countered. She had forgotten for the moment all about the pin; she was thinking about the dance.

"The man who gave you the pin, of course. I want to know about this rival of mine."

Her heart leaped at his words. He *was* interested then!

"His name is Rupert, and I met him at school last year. He's awfully nice, has dark eyes, and the nicest smile."

"It—it isn't by chance Rupert Tharp, is it?"

Rupert Tharp, the novelist. What a perfectly splendid idea. It couldn't be more perfect. Everybody knew that he was a woman hater. He had lectured at school last year, and there had been some teas, and dinners and dances for him, and he would never in the world be where she was.

"How did you ever guess?" She laughed with sudden delight. "I—I wasn't going to tell anybody here, because they wouldn't believe it could be possible that little meek me could ever, by the wildest stretch of the imagination, be engaged to Rupert Tharp."

"And you are engaged to him?" Tommy was seeking her eyes—and his face was almost stern.

He mustn't think it was a really serious matter. No, he mustn't think that. "Yes, of course." She laughed a little. "You know how those things are, you lose your head for a while. When I see him again he may not be interested at all. But he does write the most adorable letters."

She listened to her own words. It couldn't be possible that she was saying all those untruthful things so blithely, just as if they were true. She had always been so honest, and so sincere. "Let's don't talk about him, Tommy. He's there, and we're here. I know we're going to have the most wonderful time to-night with that out of town orchestra and everything."

The country club was ablaze with light. The sound of an orchestra tuning up floated out on the night, mingling with the sound of high laughter and gay voices.

Jean went up the steps and, leaving Tommy, ran up to the dressing room.

"Hello, Jean."

Dorothy Miner was before the dressing table, adding rouge to her already glowing cheeks. Slim she was, and tall, a vivid brunette with startling black eyes and jet black hair. She wasn't pretty, but striking in a vivid red frock that reached her ankles.

A dozen other girls were fluttering about.

"Hello, everybody." Jean paused before the mirror.

"Oh, look, Jean's wearing a frat pin!" some one exclaimed suddenly. "Who is it, Jean? You never told us."

The girls were all about her, besieging her with questions. She had not realized how conspicuous the pin would be on her white taffeta frock.

"That's a secret." Laughing, she escaped from them and fled to the ballroom, but they were all close behind her. She just reached Tommy, panting and breathless, when they burst upon her, all talking at once.

"Oh, Tommy, you tell us! Whose is it? Whose pin is Jean wearing? You're a Sigma Nu. Are you the lucky man? That surely is fast work."

"No, I'm not the lucky man." Tommy met Jean's eyes suddenly, and his seemed almost cold. "I didn't know that it was any secret, though. If I were Jean I'd broadcast the lucky catch. It's Rupert Tharp, the novelist."

THERE was a hushed astounded silence, and Jean felt the color flooding her face. Oh, she hated him! Why had he done that? She hadn't realized how embarrassing all this pretense was going to be.

"Aren't you thrilled to death?" That was Dorothy Miner's cool voice from the edge of the group. "He is going to be here to-night, isn't he? Cecil Marshall said he was vacationing at Buena Vista with some highbrow friends, and they were driving over here to the dance."

Jean knew the color was ebbing from her face, and Tommy was staring at her with a funny little cold look in his eyes. What did he know? Had Sue told him anything? Had Sue told anybody? She might have.

"I've been expecting him all week," she answered coolly, "but he didn't know how soon he would be able to get here. I should say I am thrilled! Wouldn't you be if your fiancé were coming? I do hope they get here early."

Her heart was in her throat, but she was standing slim and straight, her head held high.

"Girls, she's stringing us!" Dorothy

Miner drawled mockingly. "Jean, you can't carry that off! Why, everybody knows that Rupert Tharp is a woman hater! He wouldn't be engaged to anybody, and if you think you can make us believe that it's Rupert Tharp you've got another guess coming! He's engaged, according to the rumors, to Alicia Brune, and he denies even that! You're just playing a game, Jean, though heaven knows what it is. Are you renting one of Sue's pins, too? That seems to be one of the things to do this summer."

She turned to Tommy. "Surely you didn't swallow that line, Tommy! Surely!"

Furiously, Jean faced her, her eyes gleaming points of angry light, her laugh hard and brittle as she spoke.

"So you think it isn't true, Dorothy! Well, when he comes maybe you'll think differently. Just because you couldn't impress him when he was at school lecturing last year wasn't any sign that I couldn't. When he comes, we'll see."

Her head up, she turned away. Oh, she was mad! Insane! She could never carry this thing off. She never could. It was impossible.

"Jean." Tommy was beside her. The music was beginning. "Jean, I have this first dance, you know."

They swung into step, but Jean was silent, her white teeth biting her red lips to stop their trembling, winking back the angry tears that misted her eyes. Oh, she had never been in such an intolerable position in her life! What was she going to do, she thought wildly? Now they would all be watching, watching.

"I hate Dorothy Miner!" She spat the words out furiously. "She's just a cat, that's what she is. She's the most hateful, snobbish girl I know, and I can't endure her. She's just jealous, that's all!"

"I wouldn't be angry, Jean." Tommy was speaking slowly, and the look in his eyes made her shiver, as if he didn't like her any more. His voice was hard, and there was a steely glint in his blue eyes. "Because you know you aren't engaged to him. You know that it is all pretend, that you did rent that pin from Sue Gray. You're in an awfully tight place, honey, and if I were you I'd back out gracefully before it's too late. Why don't you pretend it was just a joke? It'll be a lot easier."

"So you don't believe me either?" Wrathfully she faced him, two bright spots on either cheek, her eyes blazing. "So you think it is all a put up job? Well, I'll show you. I'll show all of you, and I don't want you ever to speak to me again. I—I did think that at least you'd stand by me, but even you won't do that."

SHE must be mad, talking like that. It was her terrible red-headed temper. Why couldn't she have held her tongue, laughed it off like Tommy said, and played it was a joke? But she couldn't do that now. She was in a trap with no way out, and Rupert Tharp might come any minute.

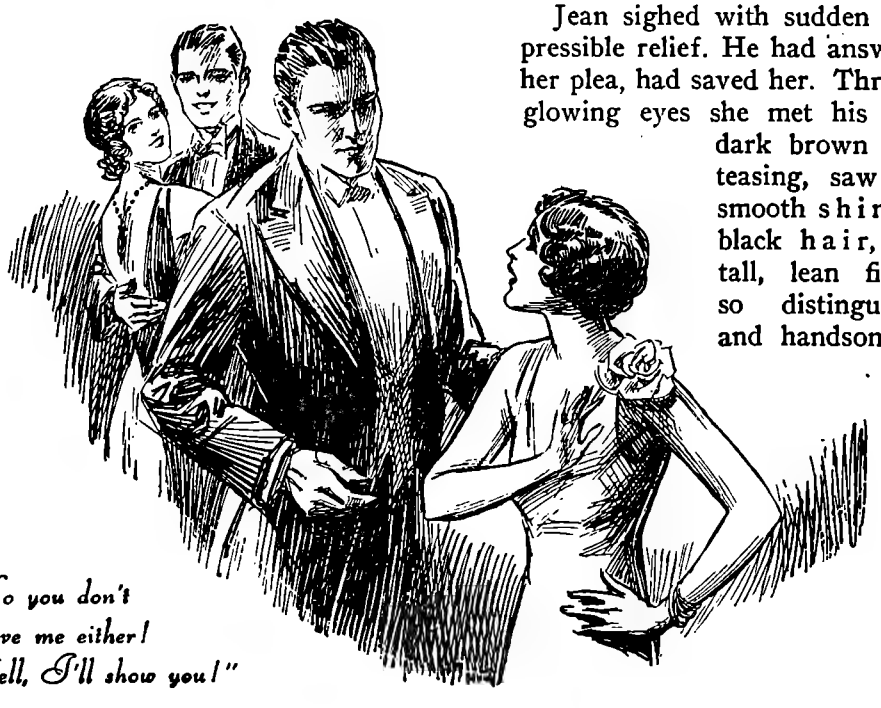
As the music stopped there was a stir near the doorway and three people entered the ballroom, an older man and woman and a young man.

For one startled instant Jean stood still, waiting. She caught a glimpse of Dorothy Miner's laughing eyes and scornful mouth. Then she turned—

Rupert Tharp, standing in the doorway, looking at the dancing scene before him, had a startled vision of a fairylike creature in shimmering taffeta, of a lovely elfin face with a pink

and white skin and scarlet mouth, of beseeching blue eyes, and a crown of red-gold hair, coming across the floor to him.

Her arms were flung about his shoulders, and he heard her voice, low, pleading, begging:



"So you don't believe me either! Well, I'll show you!"

"Please play up! Just this once! Oh, please! I'll explain. I'm Jean, Jean Rich, and I've told them that I'm engaged to you. Oh, *please* pretend!"

She lifted her face.

This was something different to relieve the humdrum monotony of a bored existence, and the girl was lovely!

"Jean!"

He held her close one instant, and bent to her crimson lips, aware of the startled eyes of those gathered about the ballroom, aware of that sudden, tense stillness.

"I called your mother, and she said you would be here, so I came on and surprised you."

"And this is Mr. and Mrs. Wilcox, my fiancée, Miss Jean Rich."

The words came clearly in the hush that filled the ballroom. There was an astounded gasp as if something unbelievable had happened.

Jean sighed with sudden inexpressible relief. He had answered her plea, had saved her. Through glowing eyes she met his own, dark brown and teasing, saw that smooth shining black hair, that tall, lean figure, so distinguished and handsome.

The music was beginning again.

"My dance, Jean."

His arm was about her. They were moving away to the music. Her feet trod air, and as they danced he smiled down into her eyes.

"You dance divinely, my dear," he said. "I'm most fortunate indeed."

She laughed breathlessly.

"Let's go out to the garden and I'll explain. Oh, you're so wonderful! It was heavenly of you to do it like that! I—I can never thank you enough as long as I live. You don't know the agony I suffered waiting, not knowing what you were going to do."

Laughing and talking, her hand resting lightly on his arm, they strolled the length of the ballroom.

Did ever a girl have such flattering attention from such a distinguished and handsome man? Did ever a girl look happier than Jean, her eyes alight, color in her cheeks, her crimson lips parted in a smile, her exquisite white frock shimmering in the light?

DOWN in the shadow of the sundial she told him the story. "And then you came. Oh, it was terrible! But you were so wonderful." Her shining eyes met his. "I can never thank you enough!"

"Well, then," he was smiling a little, that fascinating smile that made her heart leap, "why not wear my fraternity pin? You can give your friend's back to her and wear mine for a little while. I shall appreciate that."

"You mean that you'll really pretend to be engaged to me and help me out?" Her eyes were wide. This was romance. Suddenly Tommy was not even interesting. He was just a small town boy and here was a world celebrity.

"Yes, why not? I have the reputation of being a woman hater, but really I'm not. I'm afraid of them. That's the truth, but—I never saw anybody like you in my life."

"Oh, I'd love to wear it—for you!"

She flung the mist from her eyes. It was too wonderful to be true. A sob caught in her throat. She had dreamed of romance, and it had come. Romance with a capital R.

The days passed in a swift, almost unbelievable haze to Jean. Rupert Tharp had left his friends at Buena Vista and was staying at the Markham Hotel. Every day she was beside him, laughing into his eyes as they played golf at the country club, or tennis, or went swimming, dancing, or driving in his low-slung, powerful roadster.

But it seemed that every day Tommy was with Dorothy, and somehow the sight of them together, evidently enjoying each other's company, irritated Jean. She didn't want Tommy to like Dorothy, even if she didn't want him herself.

Four weeks passed, and again Jean stood in the dressing room at the country club. She dabbed a bit more lip stick to her lips, a bit more rouge to her cheeks, and straightened her curling hair.

She knew she was going to have a perfectly gorgeous time. The girls were chatting, Dorothy the center of one group.

"Yes, Tommy was talking about when we were married, and I told him I absolutely had to have an English cottage. He said anything I wanted was what he wanted. Wasn't that adorable of him?"

Jean turned from the dressing table. She wouldn't listen. Tommy and Dorothy in an English cottage! Tommy and Dorothy married! She couldn't bear the thought.

Her head erect, she moved toward the door and down the steps. A moment later she was dancing with Rupert. She noticed that Dorothy and Tommy were dancing together and were seemingly devoted to each other. She hated them.

She hated all this miserable game of pretense. It was all because of her own foolishness, but she couldn't escape, not until Rupert went back East in September. Then she wouldn't have to pretend any longer.

If he had only cared, really loved her! But he didn't. He was just pretending, and she had to play the game now. But to be really loved by Rupert!

Would anything in the world be as gorgeous as that? To be his wife, to have people point one out, to have his arms holding one close, knowing that he cared!

SHE forced a smile to her lips. She must not think of that. It was an impossible dream. She would act as if it didn't matter.

Walking with him in the garden a little later, she laughed lightly. She was lovely there in the moonlight, her hair gleaming gold, her eyes shining, her scarlet lips parted in a smile.

She met his eyes.

"Oh, Jean dear." He caught her close suddenly. "I love you! I'm crazy about you!" His arms were about her. His lips were against hers.

It couldn't be true. This didn't seem to be pretense. Not this. She fought against him, her voice breaking in a sob.

"Don't torment me, Rupert!" Her eyes were misted with tears, her lips were trembling as she spoke. "Please don't carry the game of pretend any farther! I'm so ashamed of myself already! Don't make me hate myself any more than I already do. Don't laugh at me, please don't!"

"I'm not pretending," he exclaimed passionately. "I mean every word I'm saying, and I'm not going to pretend any more! I love you, Jean darling, and I'm going to get you a diamond ring to-morrow. Diamond rings are for real engagements, frat pins are only for temporary ones."

"I—I dreamed you'd care." She spoke at last, when she could get her breath. "But I didn't see how you could when there were so many other girls in the world."

"You're different, darling, and I'm crazy about you! We'll go to Europe on our honeymoon, and see Paris, and Monte Carlo, and Rome. Won't you love that?"

He *did* mean it. Dreams were coming true!

Her face transfigured, she gave him her lips, clinging to him. Oh, the thrill of belonging to him, of knowing that he cared!

"I'd love anywhere with you!" she whispered ecstatically.

AT the next country club dance, two weeks later, Jean stood in the dressing room, the center of a group of excited girls.

"Girls, look—look at Jean's ring!" they were exclaiming wildly to each other.

She held out her hand for them to see it more closely, that exquisite ring which Rupert had given her, a glittering stone, surrounded with smaller diamonds, by far the loveliest ring ever possessed by a girl in Greenburg.

"Oh, Jean, when is it to be? That is the loveliest thing!"

"We don't know yet." She thrilled with the joy of telling it, watching Dorothy Miner's sullen, resentful face. "Rupert has to give some lectures and see his publishers on some business. I don't know whether it will be before or after. We're going to Europe, and we don't want to be bothered with business."

And she escaped from them, laughing eyed, scarlet lipped.

Then she was in Rupert's arms, dancing airily as he smiled down into her eyes.

There was a stir at the entrance and a man and two girls entered. A startled look crept into Rupert's eyes as he saw them.

"Those are some old friends of mine," he said. His voice was tense.

Swinging her about, he danced toward them, until they were directly before them.

"Alicia, you here!" he greeted the lovely girl. "And Rita—and Bill—what a trio!"

Turning, he introduced Jean to them, and as she stood there, chatting gayly, he spoke directly—to the girl before him:

"Alicia, what are you doing here at the end of the world?"

The girl to whom he spoke was the loveliest person Jean had ever seen. She was slim and tall and straight, with a strange ethereal quality about her. Her golden hair was pulled back from her face, and wound in a low coil at the back of her head. Her face was lovely, pale pink and white, with deep blue eyes, and soft red lips. Her green evening dress was tight and long, flaring at the bottom, and she wore a necklace of crystals. Sophisticated, serene and lovely, she made Jean feel like a little country girl.

The other girl was dark and haughty, with a scornful red mouth, and critical brown eyes. She had a superior attitude, and ignored Jean as if she had not been present.

But the man, a handsome, blond fellow, was smiling into her eyes.

"Yes, Rupert, I've come a thousand miles to see you," the blonde girl was saying. "I thought you were at Buena Vista, but Mrs. Wilcox said you were staying over here, so we came on over. I had to see you!"

The next thing Jean knew, her fiancé was dancing with the girl Alicia. Alicia Brune. She remembered now. She was the daughter of a multi-millionaire, and the papers had rumored her engagement to Rupert.

But Rupert was hers!

She slipped up to the dressing room and powdered her nose again, reassured after seeing herself in the glass.

Standing in the doorway of the ballroom, she watched the others dance for a moment. Then Jimmy was before her, asking her to dance.

"It's too hot!" she answered lightly. "Let's see if we can get the swing."

A moment later, seated in the big swing, with pillows behind her, she sat waiting for Jimmy to bring her an ice. Swinging there idly, she heard steps on the gravel walk below the veranda, and voices floated up to her clearly.

"Oh, I was a fool, Rupert, I'll admit that! You were so superior and so indifferent! But this summer, doing without you, has convinced me that I do care. Your letters were so cold—and always about this girl, Jean. Oh, I hate her! She shall not have you, for you're mine! I know you can never love her as you love me. She can't ever go to the places that I go. She can't give you the things that I can give you. Why, I can open the doors of every worth while place in the world. With my position and my millions, plus your talent, there's no place that we can't go. And you can't have stopped caring, Rupert. You did once, I know!"

JEAN listened, stunned. The swing was still. Her breath came in quick, panting gasps. There was no doubt now as to who those people were.

Rupert and Alicia!

What would his answer be? Taut, still, her eyes wide, she listened.

"Yes, I do care, Alicia. You're right. I've never stopped caring. I never will. But Jean was so sweet, so different. I do love her, in a way, as one loves something that is lovely, fresh, charming and young. She's an adorable child, but you are a gorgeous woman.

"What shall I do? I refuse to hurt her. I thought I loved her until you came to-night, and now I know that I don't, but I shall go on and marry her, rather than disillusion her. I couldn't do that, not even loving you."

Rupert didn't love her. He had just thought he did, because she was different, because he was trying to forget Alicia. He didn't want to marry her, but he would rather than hurt her!

She didn't want a husband who didn't love her. She wanted love more than anything else in the world.

Impulsively Jean was on her feet, running breathlessly down the steps, facing them, her head erect, her eyes filmed with tears, her lips trembling.

"I couldn't help but hear what you said. I was there on the porch, and I—I wouldn't marry you, Rupert, if you were the last man in the world, if you didn't care. It's love I want. Love, not pretense. You love Alicia, and she can have you. I don't want you."

The tears were streaming down her cheeks.

"Here is the ring you gave me." She held it toward him, and when he didn't take it she dropped it on the gravel of the walk, where it lay winking like a great eye. "I'll keep the pin if you don't mind. Pins don't mean anything anyway." Suddenly her sobs choked her. "I hope you'll be happy, you and Alicia, and you will, because you love each other."

Stumbling, she fled around the corner of the clubhouse. Her dreams had crashed. Everything had tumbled about her. She couldn't face that crowd indoors. She couldn't get to the dressing room. She must escape. She wanted to go home.

Tommy never locked his car. She could drive that, and she'd telephone from home that she had it.

Blindly, stumbling, she fled toward the driveway, toward his sedan, flung the door open, climbed in, and backed it out of the drive. A moment later she was speeding down the highway.

Her tears blinded her. She couldn't see. She pulled the car to a halt and slumped down, her head on the wheel, sobbing.

"What's the matter, Jean?"

THERE was a voice from the back seat, and Tommy was climbing over, was beside her. His arms were about her. "What's it all about?"

"Oh, let me go! I hate you! I hate everybody." She fought against him savagely. "What were you doing in the back seat? I didn't know you were there!"

"You didn't look to see! I was sitting there smoking a cigarette, and thinking a number of things over in my mind when you came along like a young cyclone. Then I began to wonder what on earth was the matter with you?"

"Well, you needn't wonder." She flung the tears from her eyes, biting her trembling lips. "I'm going home now—"

"No, you're not!" He caught her to him swiftly and his kiss burned against her mouth, his blue eyes seeking hers. "You're going to sit right here and listen to me. What's all this about? Has the great and only writer ditched you for the golden-haired dame who came in this evening?"

"No, he didn't." Fiercely she struggled, but it was quite useless. "I heard him telling her he loved her, always had and always would, but he was going to marry me to keep from hurting my feelings, and I gave him back his old ring and told him to take

her, I didn't want any man that didn't love me."

"Then you want me, darling, because I've been loving you since the first day I saw you, and I'm loving you still!"

"Tommy." She looked at him in wide-eyed astonishment, and something within her heart leaped. "Oh, Tommy, I can't believe you! Why, Dorothy said when you were married—"

"She was talking about something she didn't know anything about, as usual. But tell me—you do love me, don't you? You didn't mean all those cruel things you said to me, did you, darling? Tell me you'll forgive me for not believing you when you said you were engaged to Rupert."

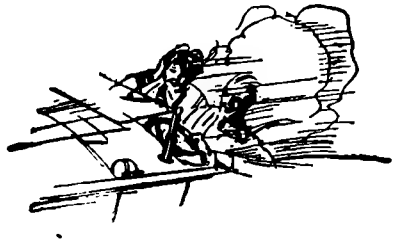
"Yes." Her voice was husky, and she clung to him. "Yes, Tommy. He just turned my head, I guess, because he was so famous and all. You made me so furious that night, taking Dorothy Miner's part, but it was all pretending. It was Sue's frat pin. I had never seen him but once before. He was just a good sport and played up."

"Then Harold was right about your renting the pin from Sue?"

"Harold!" Jean gasped. "Did Harold tell you that? Oh, I could murder that boy! But I guess I won't." She sighed contentedly. "Tommy, hold me tight, and kiss me again, and tell me you love me, and love me, and love me—"

He obeyed her until she gasped for breath! "Tommy," she said at last, "I've got a frat pin for rent now, and I wonder if I can get as good a rate as Sue. Do you suppose I could?"

He smiled down into her eyes as he held her close. "One thing is certain. You're never going to wear another. You're going to wear a wedding ring so soon that you won't have a chance to use any more frat pins, and I love you, red-head, love you and love you, and I will go on loving you always. My Jean, my wife-to-be!"



Confession

TO-NIGHT I wrote a frenzied letter,
Mad with passion—naked with my pain.
I wrote—and then I thought it better
To tear it up and write again.

To-morrow you will smile and mention
Casually, as you always do,
That always when I write, convention
Controls the words I say to you!

—*Hugh B. Cave*

Glory sawed on the bridle reins but the maddened beast plunged on

The Bride's Fate

Twice her bridal day dawned, and twice fate ruled that it should not be! Then—

By Manon Gregory

HALFWAY down the road from Tallwood, Glory Fessenden realized she was astride a runaway. Black Ace, shying at a sudden piece of paper blown across the highway, had taken the bit between his teeth. Suddenly and without forewarning the black hunter's loping canter had developed into a drumming gallop, and, as Glory sawed on the bridle reins with all her young strength, the gallop became a mad, plunging charge.

Desperately she tried to swing her mount's head about, imagining that the road to Tallwood would send the horse in through the gates toward the stables. But Black Ace kept to his course, with flying hoofs, distended nostrils and blazing eyes.

Glory, perched precariously astride him, knew the chill of despairing fear.

On for another mile along the road dappled with the soft, mellow Carolina sunshine. Fortunately there was no traffic. Clutching the reins, her piquant, pretty face blanched, Glory tried to think. At any moment they might come upon one of the sleepy little Southern wayside settlements. There would be children playing in the road, wagons and automobiles there.

The thought urged her to jerk harder on the leather that slipped between her gloved hands.

Suddenly Glory saw evidences of civilization ahead, down the speckled road. She made one last valiant attempt to curb and check Black Ace's flight, and then her heart sank at a new note that penetrated the thud of racing hoof beats.

Somewhere in back of her the musical message of a motor car's siren sounded.

Glory looked back over her hunched shoulder. A swanky, low-swung roadster was approaching. The fingers of fear clutched her heart more tightly. The pant of an automobile's engine would goad the runaway on to greater speed.

The settlement was much closer now, scarcely a quarter mile distant. And the swanky roadster was closer. Black Ace had heard its coming, too.

And then, out of whirling confusion, Glory heard a voice speaking to her:

"*Hang on!*" it called.

She was dimly aware that the car had come abreast of her; that the speaker was the man at the wheel of it.

In the next frenzied heart beat she understood his intention was to grasp the bridle rein from her nerveless fingers and halt the hunter. Even as the thought surged through her mind the reins were dragged from her hands. There came a moment of peril and suspense. Then strong arms gripping her and a cloud of darkness.

WHEN Glory opened her eyes again she was on the front seat of the roadster. The man was chafing her wrists and bending toward her. She caught a glimpse of a dark, handsome face, but one upon which selfishness and dissolution was engraved. She looked at him blankly for a minute before she sat up.

"Where—where is Black Ace?"

"The horse? I had to release the reins when I pulled you off. He took advantage, wheeled around and went dashing back. Don't be alarmed. Runaways nearly always return to their stables. Now tell me that you're quite all right."

Glory nodded, her fingers searching the front of her linen riding habit. She missed something almost immediately. The silver chain was there, but her precious locket was gone.

"My locket!" she cried in distress. "I've lost it!"

The man beside her picked up something from the leather upholstery.

"Is this it?"

With a quiver of relief Glory took it. It was only a small, well-worn silver locket. She opened it quickly. In one side a tiny faded photograph and on the other was engraved the words: "Somewhere, Some Day."

"Yes, and thank you so much. I wonder if I could ask you to take me back to Tallwood."

The stranger meshed the gears and backed the roadster.

"Tallwood? Then you must be Glory Fessenden. May I introduce myself? I am Curtiss Talbot, one of your neighbors. I live at Magnolia Court, you know."

Glory stored the locket safely away in her pocket and nodded. She had every good reason to know who Curtiss Talbot was. Ever since she had come to South Carolina her Aunt Claire had done nothing but speak of the Talbots, of Magnolia Court, and of young Curtiss Talbot, the wealthy young scion of the house.

It behooved Glory to listen when Claire Fessenden or her Uncle Sheridan spoke. Left an orphan some years past, when a giant ocean liner had gone down far at sea with her beloved parents aboard, Glory had come into her young womanhood under the guidance and tutelage of her Aunt Claire. Now she knew that the woman, ever a social climber, was thinking of a brilliant marriage for her.

And from the first, Glory had been clever enough to understand exactly what her Aunt Claire's glowing mention of Curtiss Talbot signified.

Talbot, driving with a care that was usually foreign to him, had thoughts of his own. He, too, had heard talk regarding the beauty of the Fessenden's ward.

He studied her while Glory was deep in thought. She had reddish gold hair, fluffy and lustrous. Her face was a creamy, piquant oval. He saw that her eyes were as blue as the southern sky above her; that her nose was adorably tip-tilted, and that her curved mouth held the crimson shine of dreamy roses.

Curtiss Talbot felt the beat of a sudden pulse within him.

Indulged from early childhood, Talbot had a way of eventually getting what he desired. He believed himself to be somewhat of a beauty connoisseur. In New York he had known, wined and dined the fairest flowers of Broadway musical comedy.

The girls in his own set had scarcely interested him. Beholding Glory, Talbot knew and understood there was no one he had ever met who was quite as enchanting and radiant.

Tallwood loomed up, a place of a few carefully cultivated acres, set with sycamores and an old white Colonial house that looked serenely across bright gardens. Once Sheridan Fessenden had been somewhat of a power in Wall Street. More lately the fortunes of Glory's uncle had been on the wane. She did not know this. Glory was also unaware that a tightened financial condition had prompted her Aunt Claire's wish that she make a satisfactory marriage.

"I think, if you don't mind, I'll stop in and pay my respects to Mrs. Fessenden," Curtiss Talbot offered.

"Why should I mind?" Glory murmured quietly. "You saved my life."

Talbot smiled and shook his head.

"I merely stopped your runaway. Any one else would have done the same thing. I wonder," he broke off to add, "if you'll tell me why you were so anxious about that locket?"

The roadster glided up alongside of the big porch. Glory's blue eyes held a far-away, dreaming look. She touched her pocket to make sure the locket was still safe there.

"Perhaps—sometime," she answered evasively. "It's a rather long story, and here is my Aunt Claire!"

CLAIRE FESSENDEN, a woman in the late forties, carefully groomed and with shrewd, sharp gray eyes, had emerged upon the veranda at the first sound of the roadster's arrival. For just an instant triumph flashed across her face. Then she moved forward.

"Why, Glory! What has happened? John said that Black Ace came back to the stable ten minutes ago. I was just telephoning your uncle at the bank building."

"Aunt Claire, may I introduce Mr. Talbot to you," Glory said. "I've had the most thrilling time of it. Mr. Talbot saved my life when Black Ace decided to bolt and run away."

And while Talbot murmured his pleasure, Claire Fessenden had to look out over the garden to conceal the satisfaction she felt.

For the next fortnight Glory saw Curtiss Talbot nearly every day. In a way she was rather glad of his companionship. South Carolina was lonesome after Manhattan and her friends there. On the outer fringe of society, her Aunt Claire was careful to cultivate only advantageous friendships. It was a bit too early for the social season in that part of the southland, and Aunt Claire's few friends were in Florida or abroad.

Talbot took her to tea at quaint little taverns. Once he introduced her to his mother at Magnolia Court, and showed her about the vast, imposing estate. On several occasions Glory had glimpsed a strange, almost warning look in his eyes, but she disregarded it until there came a moment when, in the garden adjoining an old tavern, Talbot's arms went about her.

"I love you!" he told her. "You're the most beautiful thing in the world! I love you, and I want to marry you, Glory!"

A little limp from the suddenness of it, Glory remained passive in his embrace. Talbot scented surrender and felt a complacent tingle of victory. He told himself that right along he had known he had only to speak and Glory, intent upon wealth and social position, would melt into his eager arms.

IT was his kiss that stirred her from her lethargy. She sat up quickly, one hand over her heart, her eyes wide.

"Oh, you shouldn't have done that! I—I'm sorry. You've been so kind and nice. But I don't—don't love you!"

Talbot's stare blended incredulous surprise with slight annoyance.

"You don't love me?"

Glory shook her red gold head.

"No, but please don't feel hurt." She jumped up. "And now do let's start back home."

"If you don't love me now," he said slowly, "you will some day. I'll never give you up. I have your aunt's permission and—"

"Have you spoken to Aunt Claire?" Glory cried.

Talbot inclined his head. He might have told her that the previous night he had spoken with Claire Fessenden for more than a half hour. Talbot had found the woman shrewdly capable. She was perfectly willing to give her consent to the suit, but she made Talbot understand there would be stipulations before Glory married him.

"Yes, I spoke to your Aunt Claire, and I have her permission. I shall not take no for an answer. Perhaps you do not know me well enough yet. I shall make you care for me."

In her room at Tallwood, Talbot's ultimatum seemed to ring in Glory's ears. She sat near the window. Outside, the southern sunset faded in the westering sky. A bird called plaintively, and once more Glory kissed the cool silver surface of her precious locket.

And there, in the tranquil hush of the approaching twilight, her thoughts spanned the restless ocean that had snatched her parents from her, and once more Glory found herself in France.

HOW wonderful to be young, happy, and less than six miles distant from Paris! In those days Glory had attended a French finishing school. It was there, one russet

afternoon, that she had met the boy with the tousled hair and the gray, laughing eyes.

His name was Julian Marshall, and he had set up his easel on the knoll of a hill near the school. Glory had watched him painting there. The quickness of his deft brush fascinated her. How long she would have remained, quiet as a mouse, she never knew, for her shadow lengthening on the grass, he had turned his head at last and seen her.

A month later Glory knew she was in love with Julian Marshall. He was an art student in the Latin Quarter of Paris, and her own academy restrictions made it difficult for them to meet. Yet there were golden afternoons on the knoll, and on one of them Glory and Julian Marshall pledged their young love. There, with the breeze in their eager faces, and with hearts beating high, they had vowed to wait for each other. Julian's kiss, pulsing on the soft, red threshold of her mouth had been their seal.

When that summer arrived John Fessenden had come to take her back to America. It was destined to be her father's last journey home from France. The night before she left had been one of silver moonlight. Among the roses in the school garden, Glory had said *au revoir* to Julian Marshall. For an eternity that lived within a minute he had held her to his heart. Then his last kiss warmed her lips and she felt the tiny package he pressed into her hand.

Later, alone, Glory found Julian's parting gift was a little silver locket with a snapshot of him in it. On the reverse side were the words, "Somewhere, Some Day." She knew so exactly what the cryptic legend meant.

Some day Julian would come to claim her, and somewhere she would be waiting for him!

Only he had never come, and the five years that elapsed since her school days in France had winged swiftly by, blurring his picture in her locket. At first he had written—ardent, heartsick love letters. She had answered, and until the winter their notes passed each other at sea. Finally Julian Marshall had gone to Rome and she had never heard from him again.

Sitting there, the world darkening outside, Glory recalled the night of their parting. She loved Julian, and would always love him. For Curtiss Talbot she entertained deep gratitude, but his love, she was certain, was something she could never return.

AT the same time that Glory relived the past, Talbot smoked an impatient cigarette in the drawing-room at Tallwood, and told his story of the afternoon's happenings to Claire Fessenden. She sat opposite, and only the angry flash of her cold eyes betrayed her interest.

"So that," Talbot concluded, "is the way matters stand."

Glory's aunt stirred.

"Glory is very young, Mr. Talbot," she explained carefully. "I am sure she does not understand the honor of becoming your wife. Perhaps I'd better have a talk with her later. I would advise you not to give up hope." She smiled thinly.

Talbot laughed.

"Give up hope? Not I! Glory will be my wife before summer comes!"

The statement was exactly what the woman wanted to hear. With Talbot in the rôle of eager, ardent suitor, three-quarters of her task was accomplished. She was confident that a talk with her niece would soon set matters

right, and gave Talbot to understand he should call in the morning.

"You can," Claire Fessenden murmured smoothly, "rely upon me, Mr. Talbot."

After he had left for Magnolia Court, Claire Fessenden swiftly marshalled her ideas. Far too clever a woman to threaten or intimidate, she decided the proper procedure should be one of motherly interest. A few moments later she knocked upon Glory's door and went into the twilight filled room.

At that moment Glory felt the need of confession. Talbot's kiss, and the soft, silken ties that bound her to the magic past, made her tremulous. Almost before she knew it she told her Aunt Claire the story of Julian Marshall and the silver locket.

"You see," Glory murmured, when she had finished the recital, "why it is that I can never love Curtiss Talbot."

The other, her keen mind busy, dropped her hand over Glory's.

"But, my child, you are in love with a memory now. This boy of France—that was five years ago, and he's a man now. It is plain he has forgotten you. How do you know he has not married? Boy and girl romances are so unsatisfactory. In later years we can look back at them in smiling wonder."

Glory shook her head.

"It isn't just a memory. It's love. And love tells me that somewhere, some day, Julian will come to me."

Aunt Claire shook her head indulgently.

"If I were you," she stated, "I would think less of the past and more of the future. After all," she declared sagely, "you owe Curtiss Talbot some consideration. He saved your life. He loves you very much, and he can offer you what few husbands have—wealth, position and youth. You might do well to think of those things. I'm sure you will."

With that advice she left Glory in the twilight.

The following morning, when Curtiss Talbot, trim and handsome in golf tweeds, wandered over to Tallwood, he found the woman with her husband on the breakfast porch. Sheridan Fessenden was a mild, gray-haired little man, completely dominated by his wife. He excused himself when Talbot arrived, and, scenting intrigue, left for the small office he maintained in the local bank building.

"What luck?" Talbot inquired, the instant he and Glory's aunt were alone.

She told him sufficient to keep his hopes at high pitch, careful to say nothing of what her niece had confessed. Then she sent her caller to the gardens where the clink of flower shears bespoke Glory gathering a morning bouquet.

WHEN Talbot left, Claire Fessenden turned back the morning newspaper to that section of it her gaze had chanced to fall upon. With tightened lips and narrowed eyes she read again the item that had to do with those celebrities who had landed in New York the previous Saturday aboard the Atlantic liner, City of Paris.

Staring up at her from the printed page was the brief statement:

> Among those on board, Julian Marshall, the American artist, returns to America for a brief stay. Mr. Marshall is well known in Paris for his portraits.

Closing the newspaper, Claire Fessenden tightened her lips. The ship with Julian Marshall aboard had arrived four days ago. Would Marshall

seek Glory out? It would be a simple matter for him to learn of her whereabouts in New York. Or had Julian Marshall married, forgotten the little school girl?

In any event, Claire Fessenden clearly saw that marriage with Curtiss Talbot must not be delayed. Besides young Marshall, there was also the possibility of Glory discovering something of Talbot's true character. The girl, with her love dreams and high ideals, would never marry one who had known promiscuous love affairs.

Glory must marry Curtiss Talbot before another day elapsed!

Out in the garden Talbot was saying good-by to Glory. In another minute he vaulted over the stone wall, striking a course back to Magnolia Court. From somewhere outside an automobile engine sounded.

The soft voice of Jonas, one of the old colored servants, spoke from the breakfast room threshold.

"Mis' Fessenden, dey's a gen'lmun what has come heah to see Mis' Glory. I done tol' him Mis' Glory's out in de gahden."

Claire Fessenden looked across quickly.

"What is the gentleman's name, Jonas?"

The servant handed her a card he carried. But even before she took it and read the name it bore, Claire Fessenden's intuition told her what it would be.

The name, "Julian Marshall," met her gaze.

GLORY had finished selecting her bouquet of colorful blossoms. She took off her wide, straw garden hat, sheathed the shears and placed them in the basket she carried. Then she started for the house.

She was midway along the path when she stopped.

Some one had opened the gate and was coming toward her. He was a tall, slender young man, who wore a dark blue suit. His gaze was focused intently upon hers and Glory, puzzled, frowned a little. She knew of no one who might make such an early morning call.

"Glory!"

Some indefinable emotion made her quiver inwardly. That voice! It struck a sharp chord upon the lute of memory and filled her ears with its tiny, thrilling reverberations.

"*Glory!*"

The basket slipped from her opening hand. She stood transfixed, her curved, scarlet lips parted, while her heart seemed to stop its beating and then throb madly. She shut her eyes to close out this dear ghost of the past, stealing to her through the yellow sunshine of the fragrant garden.

But when she opened her eyes again, Julian Marshall was still there, and his laughing gray eyes and old familiar smile told her how surely he was alive and real—how surely he had come to her.

"Julian!"

Then she was in his arms, held close, his kiss warming her with a magic fire. Breathless, dazed and ecstatic, Glory could do nothing but repeat his name and cling to him. There was a rustic bench near a drowsy clump of magnolias. Glory found herself there presently, listening to Marshall's explanation.

"I went to Italy, to Rome. No letters came to me. I was foolish, jealous. I began to make myself believe that you had forgotten me, fallen in love with some one else. I stayed in Italy for nearly a year—"

"I wrote twice a week," Glory told him.

"I know that now. A month or two ago I returned to my old studio in the Latin Quarter. And there were your dear letters, hidden away in a neglected mail box that belonged to the Russian upstairs. It was the *concierge's* blunder. When I saw and understood, I made

Then she was in his arms, his kiss warming her with a magic fire

arrangements to come over on the first available boat, find you and—marry you! Glory, do you still love me?"

She looked up at him, her gaze soft and tender. Then she mutely lifted the locket and opened it.

"I've always loved you, Julian. Loved you and knew that somewhere, some day we would be together again! Oh, Julian, so many years have gone past us."

"But so many remain!" he whispered.

In his arms, the miracle of love making her tremulous, Glory devoured him with her gaze. The tousle-headed boy of the breeze-swept knoll had grown to maturity. He was handsome, appealing and magnetic in his youthful, unspoiled way. Glory rejoiced, cradled in his embrace.

From a second floor window in the Colonial house, Claire Fessenden surreptitiously watched the drama of reunited hearts below. Her mind was thronged with ideas, but she was careful to display her usual poise and cool aplomb when, later, she faced a radiant Glory and a Julian Marshall who was anxious to make a favorable impression upon her.

"Auntie, could anything be more wonderful!" Glory cried. "Only last evening I told you about France and Julian, and now he is here! He wants to marry me and take me back to Paris!" she said, after she had made the introduction.

"I hope," Marshall put in quietly, "you will sanction it, Mrs. Fessenden."

With an effort the woman forced a smile. There was no doubt the young artist from Paris was handsome and in love with her niece. Perhaps he even had money. Still, whatever he possessed would not equal one-half of

Curtiss Talbot's inheritance, and Marshall could not offer the same chance to gratify her dearest social ambitions.

"Of course, I expect you young people to use discretion." Aunt Claire's tone was smoothly suave. "I want you to promise you won't talk of marriage for at least a month. You see, it has been such a long time since you two have known each other. I want you to be absolutely certain you are in love, truly in love."

"But, Aunt Claire—"

Marshall slipped an arm about Glory.

"Your aunt is right, sweetheart. You surely want to carry out her wishes. After all, a month is so short a time. I'll send for my luggage in New York and put up at that attractive little inn I glimpsed coming out here in the station taxi. Then, when the month's over, we'll be married and go back to France."

Glory raised her blue eyes to his.

"I'll wait if you want me to, Julian," she murmured.

MARSHALL went to live at the Blossomwood Inn, and for Glory there were happy days and moonlit nights filled with the charm of renewed romance and the Julian who had come back to her. Meanwhile, Claire Fessenden, artfully preparing her plans, arrived at the time when she saw the iron was hot.

That same night a disgruntled Curtiss Talbot drove up to Tallwood. Glory and Marshall were canoeing out on the narrow, winding river and Claire Fessenden was alone in the library when Talbot entered.

"My romance," he began, "seems to have evaporated into thin air. I thought you told me I could rely upon you, Mrs. Fessenden?"

The woman, who had told Talbot the story of the silver locket, smiled serenely.

"You still wish to marry my niece?"

"More than ever! I'm mad about Glory!" Talbot exclaimed.

"And our agreement," Claire Fessenden went on smoothly, "is still in force?"

"I'll double the payment I promised you!" Talbot promised throatily. "What have you in mind? How can you possibly prevent Glory marrying this Marshall chap?"

For a long minute the woman made no response. Then she leaned forward and Talbot saw her eyes were bright, burning like coals.

"Listen to me carefully and I will explain. It is our last chance, a desperate chance, but one I believe will be successful. I will need your assistance. First it will be necessary—"

Her voice sank to a confidential key. Talbot listened intently. When he left Tallwood an hour later his egotism, slightly crushed by Glory's inattention and her love for Marshall, had revived.

GLORY and Marshall returned from the river some two hours after Talbot's departure. The garden, white with the silver of the moon, seemed to call them, but Marshall shook his head.

"I promised your aunt I'd see her about a certain matter," he told Glory. "Won't you wait in the garden? I'm confident she won't detain me very long."

"What does Aunt Claire want with you?" Glory asked wonderingly.

Marshall shook his head.

"I'm sure I don't know. Personally, I think we should do everything possible to meet with her approval. It's

hard to think what might have happened if you hadn't had some one like her."

They had reached the gate Marshall had opened that glorious morning. A sighing breeze caressed Glory's fluffy hair and touched her cheeks lightly.

"All the same," she decided, "I always had the feeling Aunt Claire wanted me to make a marriage that would be beneficial to her."

Marshall smiled, leaning forward to steal a quick kiss.

"Suspicious?" he teased. "Wait, and don't dare go away. I'll be with you as soon as I possibly can."

Claire Fessenden was in the same chair in the library when Jonas admitted Marshall. The woman waved him into the chair Talbot had occupied, waiting until the door was shut before she began.

"You've been here a week, Mr. Marshall. I've said nothing because I've thought it best to let you and Glory become acquainted again. Now, with my niece's best interests at heart, I must ask you some rather personal questions. I know artists are popularly supposed to be rather impoverished. You are fully able to take care of Glory after you marry her, I assume?"

"I'm not exactly wealthy," Marshall replied promptly, "but I have earned and saved enough to support her rather well."

Claire Fessenden nodded.

"Another thing. There is one matter I dislike mentioning, but I am forced to. Before your arrival, Glory had a very wealthy young man who wished to marry her. Possibly she has told you of him. Curtiss Talbot of Magnolia Court. He once saved her life, and is able to offer her every luxury. More than that, Mr. Talbot was willing secretly to contribute toward the expenses of my niece's trousseau and wedding expenses."

Marshall looked keenly at the other.

"I see."

"I know I can rely upon you to keep what I tell you confidential," Claire Fessenden went on imperturbably. "At one time my husband was a man of affluence. Some few years ago our fortunes were reversed. My niece knows nothing of this, but the fact remains I am not financially able to buy her the sort of trousseau necessary to finish our deception. Five thousand dollars would be the smallest amount I could possibly do with."

For a minute longer Marshall's gray eyes held the gaze of the woman. Then, with a nod, he produced a check book and uncapped a fountain pen.

"I understand you perfectly, Mrs. Fessenden. I can see the justice of what you have told me, and I hope you will allow me to give you a check for five thousand dollars."

"Glory must never know of it! I could not be so humiliated!" Claire Fessenden murmured.

"I give you my word of honor I shall never tell her," Marshall assured her, tearing out the check and placing it upon the table. "I have made it out to *Cash*, so your name will not appear, Mrs. Fessenden. And now, shall we consult Glory and make the wedding day as soon as possible?"

The other smiled artfully.

"You might stop in here with my niece a little later, Mr. Marshall. I am sure it will be best to decide upon the date now without further delay."

The arch smile dwindled when Claire Fessenden was alone again. Swiftly she caught up the check Julian Marshall had left, a blaze of triumph in her cold, calculating face.

"This," she said softly, "ends it. I have won! Glory will never marry Julian Marshall!"

WITH the wedding date set for the end of that month, Glory was radiantly happy. Their honeymoon was to begin on the ocean and end in Julian's Paris studio. They would live abroad only until he fulfilled his commissions, and then they would come back to the States.

Glory had it all mentally planned. Marshall would open a studio in New York and grow fabulously wealthy painting the portraits of jewel-bedecked dowagers. In summer they would steal away to a little bungalow near the sea. Life would be a carefree, happy span, and love would grow stronger, more beautiful as the months crept past them.

Marshall left her at Tallwood one warm night after a long drive. On the veranda steps Glory waited until her lover, with a last wave, was swallowed up in the gloom. For an instant a premonition of impending disaster, of sorrow and heartache, touched her strangely. She wondered at it, watching the fireflies light their tiny lamps in the purple dark before she crossed the veranda and went indoors.

Old Jonas, bent with his years of service, accosted her in the hall.

"Yo' Aunt Claire want to see you-all, Mis' Glory."

"Aunt Claire? Where is she, Jonas?"

The colored man nodded toward the closed doors down the corridor.

"In the lib'ry, Mis' Glory."

Glory opened the doors and went into the book-lined room. Her Uncle Sheridan looked uncomfortably ill at ease in one corner. But Glory hardly noticed her mild, gray-haired relative. Her gaze swung sharply to Aunt Claire and from the woman to the exotically dark and beautiful girl who sat watching her from a chair near the center table.

"Glory." Claire Fessenden's tone was crisply brittle. "I want you to meet Mlle. Yvonne Dupré. She has something to tell you."

The brunette sprang up with electrical suddenness. With flashing eyes she confronted Glory.

"Give me back my sweetheart! If it had not been for you he would not have left me in Paris!"

Glory, with wide eyes, recoiled.

"I—I don't understand."

The girl made a furious gesture.

"Then I will tell you! It is Julian! We would have been married! I don't know why it was, but that morning he told me he would not marry me! He said he was going to America to marry you!" A sob choked her. "He left me there, left me and all my dreams of happiness! Ah, mam'selle, you cannot take him from me!"

By slow degrees Glory understood. She squared her shoulders.

"I don't believe it! Let me bring Julian here!"

"I am afraid," Claire Fessenden put in quietly, "it would hardly be of any use. Mlle. Dupré has tried to see Mr. Marshall at the inn, but without any success."

"Most unfortunate," Sheridan Fessenden murmured from the corner.

Glory shook her head as if to clear it. There must be some mistake. Julian could not love another and ask her to marry him! He could not take her knowing that he had not acted fairly in some secret romance of his own.

And yet—

"He loved me so! And I love him!"

the girl cried brokenly. "*Mademoiselle,* give him back to me! I cannot live without my Julian!"

"I have heard her story," Claire Fessenden said, drawing the stunned Glory aside. "It is most distressing. I was so sure of Mr. Marshall's character. I know this girl is telling the truth. She was Marshall's model in Paris, and it took all her savings to come to America. By sheer luck she traced Marshall to the hotel where he stayed in New York. They gave her to understand he had come down here. I must withdraw my consent, Glory. You cannot marry Julian Marshall after these revelations!"

Glory's hand rested over her beating heart like a fallen rose-petal.

"WAIT! There must be some mistake, Aunt Claire. Maybe this girl is an adventuress. I know Julian would never do anything that was not right. I must hear him admit the truth of this or have some evidence—"

"Evidence!" The woman stressed the word. "I think she has evidence enough to convince you."

While Glory rested limply against the table her stricken gaze followed Claire Fessenden across the room. The French girl opened her cheap suède bag and gave the woman something.

"Evidence! Mlle. Dupré saw Marshall the day before yesterday and he tried to buy her off. He tried to give her five thousand dollars so he could be free of her to marry you! Here is his check—the price of his freedom!"

With trembling fingers Glory unfolded the strip of paper. Claire Fessenden, with a single stroke of her pen, had altered the date. But Glory had no eyes for those details. She saw only Julian's familiar writing and the amount. She handed it back, something sinking within her while despair forged a tormented band about her heart.

Love had not remained the same through the years! She could not marry Julian Marshall knowing that this girl that he had promised to wed must stand like a shadow between them. She could not win happiness at the expense of another's suffering. Slowly, gradually, the light of comprehension lanced the murk of her confusion and left her dry-eyed and disillusioned.

"I believe you," Glory said to the girl in a dull, unnatural tone she hardly recognized as being her own. "Don't worry. I will not take Julian from you. I give him back to you now." She turned quickly. "Auntie, a sheet of paper and an envelope!"

Glory, winking away her unshed tears, wrote a few lines of farewell. She sealed them within the envelope, penned Julian Marshall's name and let the note flutter to the table top.

"I think," Claire Fessenden murmured, with well-feigned sympathy, "we had best think about an immediate trip, Glory. Don't you?"

Glory looked up slowly.

"Yes, to-night, as quickly as possible! I—I will get ready now!"

When she reached the door of her own room the brave courage that had kept her from giving way in the library deserted her. The room, with the white stars at the window, whirled fantastically. Glory stumbled in and groped toward the bed. She flung herself down across it, while great ravishing sobs shook her.

The pain in her heart was exceeded only by the dull agony of her thoughts. Thoughts of love—of a boy and a girl in an old world garden—of a silver locket that had been a symbol of their faith and devotion.

Thoughts of what might have been, but which could never, never come true now!

"Julian!" she cried. "Julian, I love you! I shall always love you!"

THE motor trip lasted a fortnight and ranged as far as Florida. Returning to Tallwood, Glory wondered if the old Glory Fessenden would ever laugh back at the smiling Carolina skies again. Her heart was broken.

Curtiss Talbot called at Tallwood, and again Glory was glad of his companionship. Motoring in the rakish roadster, having tea in little wayside taverns where the carnival of the springtime was carrying its blossoms into the arms of summer, kept her from brooding. Jonas had told her that Julian Marshall, coming to the house that next morning, had taken her letter of farewell and left without comment.

Never more would the garden echo his voice or the gate creak at his arrival. He had left Blossomwood Inn and, she decided, by this time was either in Paris or nearly back to France, the exotic and beautiful girl his wife. Resolutely, Glory tried not to think, not to remember, while Curtiss Talbot was an anodyne that helped her to forget.

There came an afternoon when they were in that same spot, beside one of the quaint little inns, where Talbot had once kissed her. They looked at each other across teacups, and after a minute Talbot's hand closed over hers.

"Glory! I love you so much. Marry me!"

She looked at him wanly.

"How can you love me after all that has happened?"

"That has nothing to do with my love!" he informed her tersely.

"Even knowing I—I almost married Julian Marshall? Even knowing that I still love him, Curtiss?"

Talbot laughed harshly.

"Yes, even knowing that! Marry me, Glory, and you'll forget him. You must! I'll show you new worlds, give you inspirations and happiness that will blot out the past. Don't you care at all? Have you forgotten that morning," he added, subtly interpolating the reminder, "when I met you?"

The slanting sunshine gave Glory's haggard face a golden glow. Why not marry Curtiss Talbot? He had saved her life, he had a claim upon her. Julian was lost to her forever, and perhaps Talbot, in time, could make her care for him.

"But knowing I'm not in love with you—"

"My love is great enough for two! Say yes, Glory!"

She shut her eyes. The place seemed haunted with phantoms. Phantoms that wore the face and features of Julian. Dear, dead phantoms of the long ago when life had sung its joyful, siren song.

"Say yes, Glory!"

After all, what did it matter? If she could make two people happy it was her duty to do so. Glory's great blue eyes opened. She drew a brave little breath.

"Very well, Curtiss," she said quietly, "I will marry you!"

Instantly his arms were about her greedily. Talbot's kiss flamed against the crimson barrier of her lips. Glory heard something crying out in protest within her, but she returned the kiss with the same courage that had seen her through the dark days of heartache.

"We'll go straight back to Tallwood," Talbot exulted, "and break

the news! One more kiss and then let's start, Glory!"

WITH the preparations for an immediate wedding under way, Glory found herself moving mechanically through days filled with the brightness of the declining season. There was a matter of her trousseau, the wedding gown her own mother had worn and which was in an attic trunk, the decorations and the hundred and one things necessary. Claire Fessenden, firing the first gun in her social campaign, intended to see that Glory's marriage to Curtiss Talbot would be one of the most important social events of the year.

Through the overture of the preparations Glory moved trying to arouse herself to interest. Silks and satins and a wedding veil. Invitation cards and plans for a huge, impressive reception. Only her taciturn Uncle Sheridan and herself seemed aloof and out of the busy, bustling picture.

And meanwhile the passing days brought her closer and closer to that one moment which is the most important hour in the life of any girl. Her wedding day!

The morning of the day itself dawned auspiciously. Glory was awake and up toward eight o'clock. The ceremony was scheduled for noon precisely, and her bridesmaids were due at ten.

An hour passed and then two. The other girls had arrived and donned their gowns. The orchestra had come down from Asheville. Glory could hear them tuning their instruments in the conservatory. Her Aunt Claire, harassed and busy as any stage manager, looked in briefly.

"Hurry and dress, Glory!"

Glory nodded abstractedly. She had dismissed the old colored maid and it behooved her to change from the simple silk dress she wore to her wedding gown. A strange lethargy had taken possession of her. She sat listless, preoccupied, twisting the engagement ring Curtiss Talbot had given her. The stone was a gorgeous pear-shaped diamond with little cuttings on its surface. To Glory the stone was like a cold, unrelenting mirror.

In it she saw so many things. Julian and herself with the flower basket dropped at her feet. Julian and his laughing gray eyes. The library with her aunt and a dark, beautiful girl facing her, both accusing her Julian.

Glory lifted her head as a tapping sounded on the door.

When she opened it she was surprised to find Sheridan Fessenden outside. Her uncle wore formal morning attire. Glory scarcely noticed it. Her gaze focused on his face, on the haunted expression he wore, on the almost furtive look he gave her as he slipped warily in, shut and locked the door and caught her arm.

"I must tell you something!" he whispered. "Over here, Glory, where nobody will hear us!"

Across the room, his hand unsteady on her arm, Fessenden halted her and looked about.

"What is it, Uncle Sheridan?"

Below, the orchestra had started rehearsing the wedding march. The stately measures of it tiptoed softly up.

"I have never been much of an uncle to you," Fessenden began haltingly. "Perhaps it's because I've always been dominated by your aunt. I'm sorry, Glory, but now and here I'm going to try and do one good deed. Listen to me, child. That night in the library—that girl—it was all trickery!"

Through Glory a bursting, soul-shaking thrill swept. She fell back a step, her pulses pounding.

"Trickery? Oh, Uncle Sheridan, what do you mean?"

"I can't see you marry young Talbot without knowing the truth!" Fessenden went on, rapidly now. "It was your Aunt Claire's idea. The girl is an actress from New York. Talbot brought her down here. And that check of Marshall's—it was one he gave your aunt under a promise of silence to buy your trousseau! Do you understand?"

The hot wave of exultation receded. It left Glory with wide eyes and parted lips.

"But now I can't marry Curtiss and —and Julian has gone!"

Fessenden dropped his hand upon her arm.

"You can still find your happiness if you will hurry. Trust me. Get your hat and jacket on. Slip down the back stairs. There's a car waiting for you on the south road."

A FEW minutes later Glory climbed the stone wall that marked the border line between Tallwood and Magnolia Court, and found the automobile waiting, exactly where Sheridan Fessenden had said it would be. It was one of the station taxis, a sedan with its tonneau shades discreetly drawn. Its chauffeur, a tobacco-chewing native, jerked a thumb over his shoulder to signify she should climb in. Glory looked back at Tallwood. Guests were arriving—she could see the cars rolling up the driveway. Curtiss Talbot would be there now. She remembered his eager, greedy eyes, and she shivered a little.

With a little breath she opened the tonneau door and stepped in. The chauffeur slammed the door and meshed the gears. But Glory was hardly aware of the car's forward motion.

The only thing in the world to claim her attention and hold it in spellbound wonder was the man whose eager arms flashed out to encircle her.

"*Julian!*"

Marshall drew her to him. His kiss was a miracle that seemed to end every lingering doubt.

"Don't ask me to explain," Glory heard him saying. "It's as wonderful to me as it is to you. Your uncle wired me in New York and made everything clear. I arrived here last night and met him. This elopement was decided upon then. Glory, can't you say something?"

She clung to him, laughing and crying. She knew that a page in the book of her life had been turned and that the future lay before her, bright and golden. She knew that her dreams had come true and that she was happy.

Then she touched the little old silver locket that dangled from its thin chain and her smile expressed her heart's joy.

"This is *somewhere*," Glory whispered cryptically. "And now, this minute, is *some day*. Our some day, dearest!"

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Love's Branding Iron

Swift as thought Averil shot and Evans's deadly bullet went wide

In which the mysterious bridegroom claims his runaway bride at last!

By Ethel LeCompte

Author of "Winter in Her Heart," "One Supreme Moment," etc.

WHEN her father is caught "rustling" and is about to be summarily hanged, Averil Beyle takes the only way to save him; she agrees to wed his captor, Slim Hedges, bully and bad man of the neighborhood. The strange ceremony takes place by the light of a single candle, with the tardy bridegroom wearing a bandanna over his face!

He does not speak.

Hedges had promised that he would not claim Averil as his wife until the spring, but the girl learns that he has no intention of keeping his promise

and, with her father, hurriedly leaves her ranch home and sets out bravely into the unknown.

They reach the next State, Wyoming, and find friends at the Circle F ranch. Averil, now Agnes Bailey, falls in love with the owner, Wallis Frandin. But her tragic marriage keeps her silent.

Something familiar about Frandin stirs her memory. What can it be?

CHAPTER X

"DAD!" cried Averil, as she burst into the main room of the bunk house, where her father was playing stud poker with Henry Benton and three Molliam riders.

Instantly Terry Beyle was on his feet. Throwing down his cards, he hurried to her, demanding:

"What's wrong, honey?"

Without a word, Averil clutched his arm and drew him outside. There she clung to him, trembling violently, while he reiterated his question and tried to soothe her. Presently she was able to whisper:

"Take me home, dad! Take me home!"

"Sho, sho, honey," agreed her father, while Benton, who had come to the door in time to hear her hysterical demand, offered to drive them home in his car.

During the drive, Averil, in the comforting circle of her father's arms, tried to keep from going to pieces, tried not to think.

ALONE in their cabin—the tactful little Benton, after a muttered word of cheer and encouragement, had driven away—Averil began:

"Dad, Mr. Frandin—"

She choked back a sob. Before she could continue, her father said:

"Frandin wants to marry you, and you love him—is that it, honey?"

Averil opened her mouth, but the words would not come.

"Because of me you're not free to marry this fine man," Terry Beyle went on bitterly. "But don't despair, daughter—I'll get you out of this mess. I'll get the marriage set aside. It 'll take money, but I'm due to make some real jack right after the round-up."

Averil found her voice. "So he didn't lie, after all!"

"Who?"

"Cliff Evans. He told me you were in this rustling scheme."

"S-sh, Averil! Not so loud! It's an honest—"

"Honest! Evans is forming a new herd. He plans to cut it out from the other three brands, and, with you for partner, to go up the valley and start a cattle ranch."

"Well, what's wrong with that?" demanded her father.

"I don't have to tell you that, Terry Beyle! If there are only three brands on the valley range, how can there possibly be any mavericks? Evans has branded calves that were nursing branded mothers early in the spring, so that by now they're on their own. I'd like to bet that the animals he's claiming are mostly heifers, so that he can have plenty of calves from them!"

"You're letting your imagination run away with you, girl."

Averil ignored him, and clinched her argument.

"If his scheme is honest, as you say, why is Evans afraid to record the brand in his own name? Why put it in yours?"

"He feels under obligations to his boss, of course, and—"

"Well, that needn't worry him any more," cut in Averil. "After a man knocks you senseless, you don't feel under obligations to him. Evans insulted and threatened me on the porch to-night. Mr. Frandin overheard him. They fought, and Evans went down. Then I came running to you."

Never could she tell that it was really Frandin's bitter accusation that sent her running to her father.

Terry Beyle heard her through in amazed silence, then spat out a short and ugly word.

"Well, what do you want me to do?" he asked.

"My first idea, when I heard that you were in this crooked affair with Evans, was that we should have to leave here at once. Even now I'm not sure that it's safe to let you stay. Terry Beyle, you're not getting into any more rackets, even if I have to give up this nice home, real friends like Alice Fonell and Rose Benton, and the happy times they can give me. Just think, only to-night I went to my first real party and danced for the first time with—"

Sobs choked her, for it was of Frandin she was thinking. For him her heart was breaking.

"Now Evans won't need you, for he can record his own brand," she went on, before her father could find an answer. "Dad, give me your word that you'll keep away from him, and that you'll go on working for the Circle F, and I'll stay."

While Terry was considering this, Averil was thinking:

"I'd rather pocket my pride and risk meeting Frandin again than have dad lose his job, and perhaps miss a chance to be made riding boss."

Impulsively she put her hands on her father's shoulders.

"Please, dad, promise! This is your chance to get somewhere. For God's sake don't risk getting into the clutches of the law again!"

Beyle covered her hands with his, but kept his eyes aloof from her beseeching gaze.

"I can't let Cliff down," he muttered.

"You can't let me down. You owe me more than you owe Evans."

"But where 'll I get the money for the annulment?"

"Never mind that—now. Probably I shall never care whether I'm free or not," Averil told him in a heart-broken voice.

"Averil, my baby girl!" he cried. "Don't! You—you make me feel like a cattle tick. I'll do anything you say. I promise!"

He kissed her bright hair reverently.

CHAPTER XI

JUST before sunset Wallis Frandin rode up to the Beyle cabin to try to regain the friendship he thought he had lost. Averil, remembering that her mother had always "dressed her up" for Sundays, had put on her green frock and gone out on the porch for her "glory hour." Sitting there, against the background of golden sky, with her bright hair, amber eyes, and golden skin, to the approaching man she seemed a veritable golden girl.

He dismounted, threw his mare's reins over the tie bar, and came to the porch steps.

"May I come up?" he asked the wide-eyed girl.

"Of course! I was too much surprised to remember to ask you."

"Unpleasantly surprised?" he wanted to know, as he sat down on the top step, near Averil's rocker, and leaned against the railing.

"No," she replied, but she did not say that the surprise was a pleasant one.

"You are wondering why I came over, now aren't you, Teck? May I still call you that?" he added quickly.

"You may," Averil told him indifferently. "Why *did* you come?" she asked even more indifferently.

"To tell you that your friend Cliff still lives."

Averil frowned, but did not answer his teasing.

"You didn't want him killed, did you?" Frandin asked gravely.

"Please be serious," Averil requested coldly. "I am more sorry than I can say that we had that unpleasant scene."

Suddenly the thought flashed through her mind that here was her opportunity to warn Frandin without betraying Evans directly. Not that the traitor deserved any consideration, but she simply could not be an informer.

"I am sorrier," she hastened on, "that you've made an enemy of Evans. You—you'll be careful yourself, won't you, and—and guard your—well, your property?"

At her words and her serious tone Frandin's eyes grew speculative.

"Thanks!" he said. "I wonder—"

With a shrug he stopped. There was no use dragging in a suspicion that had been nagging at him for a year; but there and then he decided to take a little trip to the county seat tomorrow, to find out who owned the strange brand that he had found on nearly a hundred heifers at the last round-up.

Averil, he noticed irritably, was watching the sunset as if he were not there. The fact that he had left his last remark in mid air did not seem to have aroused her curiosity.

"Wyoming sunsets," he remarked, "are magnificent. I hope that my being here doesn't clutter up the scenery," he added petulantly.

Averil started and turned far-away-looking eyes upon him.

"Why," she confessed, without any attempt to apologize, "I had forgotten you were there, Mr. Frandin. As you say, sunsets in the West are magnificent."

She looked away from him quickly, hating herself for bringing that wistful look to his dear face. If only she could have told him, her hand tight clasped in his, about her "glory hour"! If only she could share all her "glory hours" with him as long as they both lived! She drew in a quick, quivering breath.

Frandin stood up suddenly and looked over the railing. Then he descended to the ground and cautiously peered around the corner of the house.

"I'm surprised," he informed the wide open spaces.

Averil could not restrain her curiosity.

"Were you looking for something?" she asked.

"The atmosphere hereabouts is so frigid," he told her gravely, "that I thought possibly you had a pet polar bear or two around."

"I'm sorry you don't like the atmosphere, Mr. Frandin," Averil retorted, her voice lowering it another degree. "Are you staying for supper?"

Red showed under his tan.

"Good evening, Miss Bailey!" he said, slapping on his sombrero.

Averil, in the shadow of the doorway, yearned after him as he tore wildly across the clearing to the trail. Perhaps she had better go away, after all. It was too hard to meet him day after day and to maintain her attitude of coldness. With a stifled cry she hurried to her bare little bedroom.

SCARCELY had she gained that haven when she heard her father's footsteps on the porch. When she faced him, five minutes later, she was pale but composed. She did not mention either her visitor or her half formed resolve to leave the Circle F.

"Evans is sore as a pup," Terry Beyle told her heavily. "He has it in good for the boss for last night's affair, and when I sprung my little resignation he went off the handle."

"That didn't influence you, I hope," Averil said shortly.

"Course not, honey. My!" he went on, changing the subject awkwardly. "When I see you looking so pretty, I feel so proud of you, and so guilty that it wasn't me who gave you the nice dress!"

"I wish it had been you," Averil told him earnestly; "but if you stick it, you'll be buying me just as nice by this time next year. Rose Benton is a darling," she added, her eyes lighting up. "I wish I could do something to show her how I feel, and to repay her a little!"

It was the very next day that Averil had her wish.

At nine o'clock on Monday morning, Henry Benton chugged up to the Beyle cabin in his car, his face anxious, his manner nervous. Averil left her washtub and ran toward him, drying her arms on her apron as she went.

"My dad?" she cried, her heart thumping.

"No, Miss Bailey—it's Mrs. Benton that's took bad. I thought maybe you'd come over and stay with her until Doc Mills gets there. Me and Lum Kee can't do a thing to please the pore gal. I don't want to phone Alice to come over, and get her all scared."

"Of course, I'll come right along with you. I'm proud that you asked me. I've just got to spread these clothes out on the bushes to dry. I wouldn't stop that long, only dad 'll be needing a clean shirt to-morrow. I'll leave him a note."

Wearing her riding clothes, with her apron and slippers in a bundle, she got into the car.

"Why the gun, Miss Bailey?" Benton asked with a grin.

"Just habit, I guess, Mr. Benton," answered Averil, grinning back.

They found Rose in a high fever and a towering rage. Benton made his escape immediately.

While Averil's strong, capable hands tended the sick woman's bodily needs, the girl's soft voice soothed and comforted her. When Dr. Mills arrived, Rose was feeling in a better humor. Indeed, she seemed quite pleased with herself, dolled up in her best pink gown and cap and luxuriating in a well made, immaculate bed. She was so mollified that she did not fly into her usual tantrum when the doctor told her bluntly that she had been overeating again.

"That Saturday night jamboree finished you," he concluded. "I saw you stoking."

"Why didn't you stop me?" Rose wanted to know.

"Who could stop you? Besides, I'd have lost this fee," he chuckled. He turned to Averil. "Didn't I see you at Alice's?" he asked.

Rose answered that.

"Yes," she said. "This is Miss Bailey."

The doctor bowed gallantly and twirled his mustache. He proceeded to give directions as to the patient's care and diet. As soon as he had left, Rose caught Averil's hand.

"Jennyfret!" she exclaimed. "I was so taken up with my own self, I forgot to ask you why you left on Saturday night without waiting for the eats or saying good-by."

Averil flushed.

"I—I felt ill—tired," she stammered. "Please forgive my rudeness, Mrs. Benton. I'm not used to—to so much gayety. I must explain to Mrs. Fonell."

"Think up a better explanation, then," Rose came back tartly. "You had a row with Wally, or I miss my guess!"

INSTANTLY Averil decided that she might as well tell the truth—part of it, that is.

"I did," she confessed with trembling lips.

"The course of true love!" said Rose fatuously. "I had the same trouble with Alice and Bill. Both of them were as stiff-backed and proud as all get out, the young idiots! But I put a flea in Bill's ear, and he did a *Young Lochinvar* act and won the gal."

She went on to tell the story, little guessing the pain she was inflicting.

Presently she slept, and Averil went outside for a breath of fresh air, determined to throw off her unhappy thoughts. She was joined by Henry Benton, who first asked about Rose and then said:

"Say, Miss Bailey, I was thinking maybe I'd best ride over to see your dad and tell him you're going to stay here a couple of days."

Averil could not help smiling at his little subterfuge.

"You might stop there on your way to the Molliam bunk house and your little poker session," she answered, laughing softly.

Benton started and glanced about nervously. Then he grinned sheepishly.

"Don't give me away," he entreated.

"Course not," Averil reassured him.

Next morning, at breakfast, Benton gloated over his luck.

"I didn't get in until midnight, and I won fifty iron men," he said. "Skeet and Blackie lost their shirts!"

"That's great," replied Averil. "And dad?" she added anxiously.

"He was all right. He'd got all the clothes in, too."

"Did he say he'd be over to see me to-day?"

"Yes, this evening. To-day he's going into town — no, he's going to ride circles while Cliff goes in — oh, shucks, I forget which it is!"

"Please, please, Mr. Benton, try to remember," Averil begged.

"He'll tell you to-night—not that it matters so far as I can see."

"But it does," Averil insisted.

"Why?" demanded Benton in surprise.

Averil caught herself in time.

"I want him to get me something in town," she evaded.

"I can get it," offered Benton eagerly. "Give me a chance to get away!"

Averil shook her head, angry at his absent-mindedness. Taking Rose's breakfast tray from Lum Kee, she went up to the sick room.

Later in the day she told Rose that she must go over to her own home for some clothes, but would hurry back. Rose demurred, but let her go finally.

As she was crossing the yard to borrow a horse, she met Lum Kee, who asked plaintively if she was going home to stay. When she told him that she would return, he brightened.

"Keep Missy Lose top-side house long time, eh?" he purred.

Averil laughed and hurried away.

After she crossed the river at the ford, the trail ascended sharply and skirted the edge of a shallow but steep cliff. A noisy waterfall emptied into the little ravine, drowning other sounds. Hence it was not until she was almost directly over them that Averil became aware that there were two or more men under the cliff. She drew rein.

"I'm done talking, Frandin," she heard Evans shout angrily.

AVERIL, her heart in her mouth, slipped from her horse and quickly hobbled him. On hands and knees she crept to the edge of the bare rock. About ten feet from the wall of the cliff, and facing her, stood Evans. With a swift pang of pure terror she saw that he had Frandin covered, and that the latter's belt and gun lay on the ground behind the other man.

"Them's my stuff," Evans was saying. "All of 'em's honest mavericks that I been picking up here and there right along."

"Then why didn't you record your brand?" Frandin asked coldly.

"I ain't had time to go over until to-day, and then, when I do, I find that you sneaked over—"

"Careful with your words, Evans!" interrupted Frandin.

"Careful is it, with the shooting iron in my hand? Don't make me laugh, boss! I repeat it—you sneaked over and recorded *my* brand in your name. What right you got to steal—"

"Careful, Evans!" Frandin warned a second time. "I went over to see who owned the strange brand, being curious because there were so many mavericks sporting it this year, and nearly all were—heifers."

Evans grew red with rage, and his eye squinted down the sights of his forty-five.

"Zat so?" he snarled. "We've finished with all that palaver. What I'm trying to make you understand is that you've got to assign that brand back to me. You're going to be poked along with this iron until we get where there's paper and pen. That's at Beyle's place."

"Is Beyle in on this?" asked Frandin sharply.

"Sure he is! And you sticking up for the old buzzard's gal, when she's in the gang, too!"

Averil's gasp and Frandin's oath were simultaneous. He took a quick step forward.

"You lying maggot!" he cried. "I'll—"

"Get back there, or I'll kill you!" warned Evans.

Frandin jumped sidewise with a great bound, and Evans's shot went wild. Before the echoes of it had died away, another shot rang out, and Evans screamed in agony and dropped his gun. Averil had shot him through the shoulder.

CHAPTER XII

IN less time than it takes to tell, Frandin had possessed himself of his enemy's gun and his own. He swung around and faced the cliff.

"Come down, friend!" he called. "Let me see who you are!"

Averil showed herself above the log to which she had retreated.

"My God, Teck!" gasped Frandin.

"Why," asked Averil sternly, "didn't you give him back his old brand? Your life's worth more than a few heifers."

"I was about sold to that idea myself when he lied about you."

"How do you know it's a lie?"

He grinned.

"Foolish question. I'd hoped that shot of yours had killed all the arctic pets you've taken unto yourself since Saturday."

"My shot hit its mark and—no more," retorted Averil. "Now I'll hurry back to Benton's, and if the doctor's there I'll tell him to wait until you get Evans to him. The man's suffering, I'm afraid, judging from his groans and his language."

"Thanks, Teck; but wouldn't it be best to send Doc Mills over to my place?"

"Benton's is much nearer, and the doctor's due there, so it 'll save every one time and the wounded man pain." She was on her horse, ready to start. "I must tell you one thing," she added. "Dad was in with Evans, but he thought it was an honest attempt on Evans's part to start for himself. On Sunday he told Evans he was through with it."

Averil, before the mirror, could only gasp delightedly

She did not wait for his reply.

Luckily she met Dr. Mills before he went in to see his patient. He eyed her sharply and asked what was wrong. In a few words she told him, adding that Evans would be in the bunk house by the time he had finished his visit to Mrs. Benton. At the doctor's suggestion she went into the kitchen for a cup of tea before facing Rose.

"Tch, tch!" clucked Lum Kee.

"You look allee samee you catchee one pieeee sick, allee samee, Missy Benton."

He shuffled around busily, and in a very few minutes Averil was sitting in a big, comfortable chair in a sunny window, sipping hot, fragrant tea.

Skeet had come in for hot water and clean rags, and Lum Kee had gone with him. Averil found it pleasant, after all the excitement, to be alone. She closed her eyes and dreamed a wonderful dream which, but for Slim Hedges, might have been wonderful reality. It was the voice of her companion in that pleasant land of might-have-been that roused her.

"Teck, dear," said the voice, "are you quite all right?"

"Of course I am. Would you like some tea—Ace?"

"Ah, the polar bears are dead!"

"I shouldn't say that," Averil returned, as she made fresh tea; "but I'll admit that they can't live in this warm place."

"Heaven bless old Lum Kee, who keeps it warm, who gave you that hot tea, and who suggested that I should come in for some, the wily old heathen!"

She poured tea for them both, sitting close to him, and still lapped in the magic of her dream. Her face grew rosy, her eyes danced to a new and thrilling tempo. In her heart she could call him "beloved," as he told her over and over how brave she was; but she decided that here and now were the proper place and the proper time to tell him that they were pals again—pals and nothing more.

NEVER could she tell him of her marriage. Even if it were annulled, there remained that hectic hour under the crescent moon with a man mad with delirium, drink, desire, or a combination of all three. With the coming of real love, Averil marveled that she did not hate that hour of half awakened passion. Instead, she kept her strange, almost shameful secret buried in her heart, not daring to tear it out, even though love for this man by her side flooded her whole being.

"Little dreamer," Frandin murmured, "if only I knew of what or whom you are dreaming! Tell me what makes you frown and look sad, and what makes you smile that fascinating three-cornered smile of yours. What happy hours were you remembering, golden-eyed child?"

Averil laughed softly, but did not answer.

"First you were thinking of the future," he went on, "for your head was thrown back. Then of the past, for you looked down."

"Are those infallible signs?"

"They are. Tell me, Teck, was it that you were thinking of me, and then pushed me aside to go back to another you loved better?"

His hand reached out and caught hers. From the contact she felt a magnetic current flow through her, and from his eyes she knew that he felt it, too. Slowly, steadily, those eyes, even more than his strong clasp, were drawing her to him. She caught herself on the very verge of the sweetly perilous yielding. Just as overwhelming emotion surged between them, she forced herself to tell him, as she had planned, that they were not and never could be lovers. Instead of the red rose of love, she offered him the pale flower of friendship. Then she wrenched herself free and fled, not knowing whether he accepted or scorned her offering.

Rose greeted her with open arms.

"It's too romantic for words, darling child!" cried the inveterate matchmaker. "I'm simply wallowing in it. It's even more thrilling for the heroine to save the hero than t'other way around. Jennyfret, what a swell wedding you're going to be given by your Aunt Rose, Teck, my girl!"

"Wedding!" gasped Averil. "Why, Mrs. Benton—"

"Aunt Rose, if you please. After round-up we'll have an engagement party, and then a Christmas wedding."

Averil laughed shakily.

"Don't you remember that I told you that Mr. Frandin and I are just pals?"

"Jennyfret! Drat the child! Teck, don't be an Airedale!"

Averil seized the opportunity to change the subject.

"Don't insult Letty," she cried; "and don't forget you promised me one of her pups."

Rose waved that aside.

"I know that Wally lad. He's crazy about you. Men don't want girl pals. Now go away and let me think and plan for the two big affairs."

Averil was desperate. She could not let Rose go on with her wild scheme; but it took much talk to convince her that there was to be no engagement, let alone a wedding. They compromised on a round-up party. The excitement, however, acted like a tonic, and nothing would do but Mrs. Benton must go up and see what the storeroom might hold that would be good enough for Averil's party frock.

"I can wear my green dress again, can't I?" the girl suggested.

"Like the letter before M, you can!" Rose flared. "But there's not a darned thing here," she concluded after a frantic search.

No more was said of the new dress after that, so Averil concluded that, despite Rose's denial, she would wear the green one.

Just after sundown Terry Beyle arrived, greatly excited and upset by the big event of the day, but immensely proud of Averil for saving Frandin's life, and thankful to her for having kept him out of the whole affair.

Although he was lonely without her, he did not begrudge Mrs. Benton his daughter's bright and efficient companionship. Averil, for her part, experienced for the first time the feeling that he could be trusted not to get into any more difficulties. Her belief in him proved to be justified, for from that point his life was as Sally Beyle would have wished it to be, and it was devoted to their daughter.

After much thought he decided to write to Rev. Styles, to ask him for news of Hedges. There was always the chance that the man might have got his just deserts, and how wonderful it would be to tell Averil that she was free!

CHAPTER XIII

THE next morning Alice Fonell rode over on Beauty, her cream-colored mare. Averil thought she had never seen anything so lovely as this slender girl in her smart London-cut riding clothes.

Rose had telephoned to her sister as soon as she had heard about the shooting, of course; but Alice was eager for details and warmly enthusiastic over Averil's bravery and good marksmanship. After the affair had been discussed from every angle, Rose held forth on the subject of Averil and Wallis.

"Just a couple of pals—that's what they are pleased to consider them-

selves," she concluded. "Just a pair of dumb-bells would be more like it! Honest to Jennyfret, Alice, wouldn't they grind your agitator?"

Alice, noticing Averil's distressed face, told Rose to attend to her own affairs, and reminded her of some of her past failures as a matchmaker. Rose sulked for a while, but brightened as she remembered her round-up party.

After much discussion, it was decided to have the gathering at the Molliam Ranch. For one thing, Billy was teething, and could not be left for long. For another, Mrs. Benton and Lum Kee always fought so over the arrangements for even a small party that Rose would be in bed for days after. Besides, the Fonells' house was larger, and Alice had her heart set on giving a formal entertainment.

Rose, declaring that Averil had found the one human spot in her old cook's make-up, dispatched the girl to coax him to prepare them an elaborate tea. When Averil returned, she had the feeling that Rose and Alice had been talking about her—that is, discussing her in a friendly way, not criticizing her.

During the tea—Lum Kee came across royally—she noticed Alice's speculative glance and the interchange of significant and approving looks between the sisters.

On the very day when Averil was at last released by the plaintive and much abused Rose, and allowed to go home, an answer came from Rev. Styles. Terry Beyle had read it before he brought it home. Sick at heart, he greeted his daughter, wondering how he could ever break to her the strange news that the old preacher's letter contained. He waited until after the evening meal, and then did so abruptly, thrusting the missive into her hands as they sat before the fire.

With mixed emotions, Averil read:

In answer to your letter of recent date, have very strange and interesting information to give you. In the first place, Slim Hedges is still very much alive, acting as lawless and drinking as heavy as ever; but, as you will find when you read this letter, it is not with Hedges that you and your daughter are concerned.

Four days after the wedding—which, old Larry tells me, is the day that you left here—Hedges came to me, disgustingly intoxicated and in a towering rage, asking what I knew about the ceremony. Astounded at his question, I told him what happened. At that his fury knew no bounds. He used the vilest language I ever heard, and declared that he had been double crossed by his half brother, who had stolen his place as bridegroom while he was drunk.

Naturally I did not believe his wild tale. When I tried to tell him so, he became frenzied and, to my consternation, dropped to the floor unconscious. When he awakened he was quite sober, but he still stuck to his story. His half brother, whose name I neglected to ascertain, had come here to try to get Hedges to change his habits and go away with him somewhere, just the day before the wedding.

Hedges and he fought about it, and Slim knocked his brother out. An hour or so before the wedding he met his brother on his way to the railway station, looking pretty groggy. Hedges boasted about his beautiful bride-elect, and how he intended to break the promise he had given her to keep away from her until spring. He dragged the other man into Bill's place to make him drink to Averil.

The brother, who was ill, refused to drink. He tried, instead, to make Slim change his mind and not marry the girl. Hedges laughed at him, and went on drinking. He drank more than he intended, and by the time set for the wedding he was under the table, unconscious.

Hence, my dear Beyle, it is safe to say that Averil married the half brother of Slim Hedges, and not Hedges himself. I have ventured into that den of iniquity, Bill's place, and Bill himself told me that Hedges and a stranger did quarrel that night over some girl, and that after Hedges ceased to take interest in things the other man asked for my location. Bill does not know the stranger's name, but says he appeared to be a man of much better class than Hedges, although, through illness, or for some other reason, he did not seem quite normal.

I will try to find out the man's name, but am afraid to ask Hedges direct, for he may guess that it is for you I want it, and try to get your present address. As you see, I am mailing this letter to a friend in Chicago, who will remail it to you, so that Hedges will not hear about it from our gossipy postmaster.

Averil could not read this letter through without stopping for ejaculations of excitement and surprise. When she had finished it, she read it again with further comment. Mixed with her relief that the unspeakable Hedges was not her husband was intense curiosity concerning the man she had married. If it were not for Wallis Frandin she would have been anxious to find him.

Who was he?

CHAPTER XIV

DURING the weeks that followed, Averil had little time to brood, for she was living with Rose, while the men were busy on the range, rounding up their cattle, and then driving the animals they had sold to a distant station. She did not dare to become abstracted, with Rose's sharp eyes upon her, and it was only at night that she let herself go. She grew thin, and her wild-rose color faded. Rose administered tonics, and Lum Kee coaxed her failing appetite with all sorts of dainties, but neither brought about any improvement.

The day came when all the work was done, enabling the ranch people to go back to their normal lives and Averil and her father to return to their own home. Cliff Evans, Terry Beyle told her, was still in hospital, blood infection having set in. Despite the fact that she had dealt him only what he deserved, this was an addition to her already heavy load of worries. Frandin had not made any charge against his erstwhile riding boss, but there had been some scandal, and the authorities had made inquiries. Averil, however, was less worried about these than about Evans's attitude when he regained his health.

She had no desire to go to the long planned round-up party. Had she not been fearful of offending Rose, she would have stayed at home. Terry Beyle, when Mrs. Benton first invited him, had begged off, declaring that he "had never been much for highfaluting parties." Henry Benton envied him openly, but Rose sent his dress clothes over to the Molliam Ranch, so that Bill Fonell could see that he was dressed properly.

Hearing the story of this outrage from Benton himself, Averil felt anxious about her own clothes, which certainly would not fit into a picture where there were men in Tuxedos. When Rose called for her, however, and she saw that Mrs. Benton was wearing the same dress that she had worn last time, she took heart again.

They found Alice Fonell still in negligee. After affectionate but hasty greetings, Averil was led to Alice's bedroom. Rose dramatically flung open the door.

"Surprise, Teck, surprise! Hope you like it!" she cried, and pushed the girl into the room.

At sight of the orchid-colored chiffon velvet gown spread upon the bed, Averil drew a sharp breath and uttered a cry of delight; but she would not believe that the exquisite creation was for her. Finally they made her put it on. At sight of herself in the long mirror, she clapped her hands in unaffected glee.

The tight-fitting bodice molded the lissom lines of her girlish figure, while the low-cut neck line revealed her firm, rounded bosom and well modeled arms. The cleverly cut skirt, lined with a paler shade of orchid, was quite long in the back, and the skillfully draped girdle ended in an enormous bow on the right hip. Huge flowers of orchid velvet in darker shades were appliqué on the gown, one on the bodice and three on the skirt. Plain opera pumps of orchid satin, flesh-colored hose—Averil's first pair of silk stockings—and a necklace of amethysts completed the exquisite picture.

Rose cut short Averil's choky attempts to thank her with an explanation of the miracle.

"It must be our first and last rendezvous," she told him tremulously

"I set the old bean to work," she said. "The answer was, telephone Molly Fonell — that Bill's flapper mother, who lives in New York, and who's the swellest little friend in need. I described you to her, gave her the measurements I had from making the green dress, told her Alice's slippers fitted you except that they're a bit too wide and a bit too short, and—here you are!"

Averil kissed Rose again.

"Now I know how a queen in her coronation robes feels," she exclaimed.

"You'll know how it feels to be crowned, all right, if you don't show me Wally's engagement ring before

dawn!" threatened Rose, as she slipped out of her own dress.

ALL the light died out of the girl's face, and she leaned heavily against the foot of the bed. Alice, while Rose's head was under the gown she was donning, gave Averil a quick word of encouragement.

"Molly didn't send me a pink dress," Rose was grumbling, as her blondined head appeared above the silver-gray cut velvet gown; "but somehow this does make me look more refined," she added, as she patted the slenderizing lines, smoothed the soft fur, and perked up the rose-pink shoulder flowers.

"Then try to act like a lady for once," her sister laughed. Turning to Averil, she went on: "While Rose was paying for a long distance call, she decided we might as well all have party rags."

Going to the closet, she brought out a shimmering gown of gold-embroidered lamé made piquantly saucy by a peplum of orange tulle. Satin slippers of deep burned orange and a rope of sun-tan pearls, with earrings to match, and Alice was ready.

When the three made their appearance, they were greeted by Alice's delighted husband and Rose's rebellious one. Benton, however, at the sight of them, momentarily forgot his resentment. He complimented them with surprising gallantry, but added to his wife:

"For once you don't look like an overblown peony!"

His punishment was delayed by the arrival of the first guests. Averil had met most of them at the previous party; but then she had been merely an exceptionally pretty girl, while now she was a beauty. The color of her gown, which accentuated her newly acquired air of vague sorrow, gave her also sophistication and allure. She was used to men's admiring eyes, but it was new to have women regard her with envy. She attributed it to the gown, not realizing that it was she herself who was ravishing.

The knowledge that she was well dressed added charm and assurance to her manner. Even when she at last stood face to face with Wallis Frandin, she retained her poise, though her heart was beating almost to suffocation.

"Lord, Teck, but you are lovely!" Frandin told her huskily, as he took her in his arms to dance.

Just that and no more; but his eyes never left her face, and as they gained the semiprivacy of the huge bay window, she felt his lips brush her hair. She danced with her host, and then with Benton, Dr. Mills, and the other men whom she had met at the first party, as well as some new ones.

BUT it was Wallis with whom she was dancing when the radio program changed. The next feature was an "old-time love song hour," and for once every one was content to stop dancing and listen to the beautiful melodies of long ago. Each couple sought one of the comfortable divans or love seats which—so Frandin whispered to Averil—Alice had provided for just such an occasion. Her husband, just as thoughtful, dimmed the lights and replenished the big fire in the stone fireplace at each end of the room.

Quick action on Frandin's part gained for him and his lady the coveted bay window. He grinned down at Averil and went on about Alice and Bill, who, according to him, were still

such confirmed petters that they provided corners and opportunities for their guests.

"'Come, come, for happiness is waiting,'" invited a radio singer.

"Shall we, Teck?" asked Wallis softly.

"I'm happy now, Ace. Aren't you?"

"You know what would make me happier!"

"Why, Ace, you're not trying to make love to me, are you?" Averil demanded, trying to make light of the situation.

"You know I am, sweet!"

Sweet! The word reminded her of something, but she had no time now to try to recall what it was.

"We are pals," she was protesting.

"That's the sop you flung me last time, but you didn't hear me cheer with joy over it, or even accept it, did you?"

With a short, sharp laugh he stood up and took a backward step. There he halted, looking down at her, devouring her with his eyes.

"The wonder of you!" he said in a voice that thrilled his beloved to the roots of her being. "Golden girl with brave, true heart, you saved my life once, so it is yours. Don't you want it, little love? Don't you know how it is with us—you and me? Why, that moment of our first coming together was enough to tell me. Then that hour together before my fire, that moment when you were in my arms, and the kiss that meant a sacred pledge! Ah, you know as well as I that it did, my dearest!"

Averil stared up at his dark, passionate face, fascinated. The fact that he was standing there, not touching her, but moved to this outburst merely by sense of sight and by memory, thrilled her more than any wild embrace would have done in her present state of mind. Desperately she tried to break the spell which, because she had married another, could only prove her ruin.

"It's the magic of the place, the old love songs, and my lovely gown," she said, "that make you feel poetical and—"

"Have your fun, Teck," he interrupted, his voice almost a growl. "There you sit, as beautiful as a Greuze painting, and as detached under inspection. But"—he leaned closer—"I dare you to come out under the stars with me. I warn you, I shall awaken you, beauty!"

"Awaken me?" she repeated with a maddening smile. "How little you know of me! Since that very first day I've been—oh, how can I say it without sounding theatrical? Well, I've been happy and I've been sad, because of a feeling of delightful anticipation. It seemed that just beyond the turn in the road some thrilling, wonderful experience awaited me. It was because of you, and I knew that it was. It was you who might be beyond that turn in the road—you with your love, your talk of love, your kisses—" She broke off to laugh softly. "And you dare *me* to come out under the stars with you!"

While she had been speaking, he had slipped back into the seat at her side, but he had not by so much as a finger touched her. He drank in her beauty and her amazing words avidly. Though his heart was hot within him, and his arms ached to embrace her, he made no move that might shatter this moment of ecstasy. To think that he was loved by this adorable creature, who, like himself, realized that love meant more than actual embraces, who knew the exquisite emotion of anticipation, and could frankly tell him of it!

"Darling!" he breathed. "Darling! Darling!"

"If I go out under the stars with you this once," said Averil, "will you promise never to ask for another such rendezvous?"

Frandin gasped as if he had received a quantity of icy water right in his face.

"I will not promise!" he answered.

"Then I shall not go."

"Little teasing witch!" he called her between clenched teeth.

"Far from that," she told him sadly.

"Give me a reason why it should be our last," he challenged.

"If I do, will you promise?"

"There is no reason on earth; but let me hear it now."

"No," she refused. "Ah, there's the music! Shall we dance?"

They circled the big room and halted at a door. Through this, and across the hall to the outside door, he danced her. There he stopped long enough to snatch up a wrap for her and to murmur:

"Got that reason ready, sweet?"

"If only I hadn't!" she breathed.

Out there, under the stars, in the moon's silvery light, he took her in his arms. She raised willing lips for his kiss. At the contact, the pressure increased, and his arms tightened until all her sensations were in a state of helpless surrender. His heart thudded against her own, which was beating wildly. Though she knew that this was to be their last embrace, their last kiss, it was she who made the first move toward separation.

"I shall never let you out of my arms," he told her, but she smiled up at him and gently freed herself. With a tenderly teasing laugh, he mocked: "Now, dare to tell me that you want this to be our last rendezvous, little wife to be!"

"I don't want it to be," she replied, "but it has to be. Ace, my dearest, I—am—married!"

CHAPTER XV

BEFORE Wallis could answer, or even banish the dreadful look from his eyes, Averil was gone. She did not go to the bunk house tonight, as she had that other night, for her father was not there. Instead, she climbed into the Benton car, with the feeling that she had burned her bridges behind her. But for the half brother of Slim Hedges, the stranger who, with the intention of saving her, had wrecked her life, she might now be sitting with Wallis, planning their future life together.

From the house came the music of the radio, laughter, merry voices, and the clatter of dishes. In there were security and happiness. Under the stars with Wallis she had known ecstasy, rapture; but out here, alone, she felt something quite different.

There was something sinister, even menacing, in the whip of the bitter night wind. The stars, too, seemed to glitter coldly, like the eyes of enemies, instead of guardians. Even the moon appeared unfriendly with that ribbon of dark cloud across her face. The stream that fed the lake sang a mocking song to-night, not its usual gay tune.

From afar came the barks of coyotes and the booming cry of a nightjar, the sheer loneliness of which made Averil shudder. The wind brought to her the acrid smell of willows, the resinous scent of pines. The peaks of the mountains seemed like bared fangs thrust up into the sky, not the shelter-

ing barrier that had always given her a sense of happy security. She shivered, and decided to go back to the house.

She peered out of the open car toward the brightly lit house, to see if the coast was clear for her return. She must not meet Wallis again to-night!

Suddenly his tall figure swung across the porch and down the steps. There he hesitated, and then came toward her. Slipping to the floor of the car, she crouched there, afraid to breathe. A few seconds later she heard the crunch of approaching footsteps, and then—other footsteps and a mocking laugh.

"Well, Frandin, I guessed right!" snarled a hoarse voice, which Averil recognized, with a start of pure terror, to be Evans's. "I thought you might take a stroll out into the moonlight, you—"

A string of oaths followed, the last punctuated by a muffled shot. Evans had had his gun covered with a heavy cloth, or had fired with it held tight against his victim.

A cry from Frandin, the thud of his body as it hit the hard ground, Evans's retreating footsteps—

Averil was out of the car and running wildly toward the spot where Frandin lay, face down, close to the watering trough. She stumbled in her high-heeled slippers as she ran, hurting her feet and ruining the slippers. She bumped into a tie bar, bruising her arm, but did not even feel it. She dropped to her knees beside Frandin.

"Are you dead?" she cried. "Wallis, Wallis, are you dead?"

IT took all her strength to turn him over and to get his head upon her lap. He was helpless and leaden as the dead, but he was breathing. By the light of the moon she could see that his eyes were closed and that sand stuck to his forehead. She wiped his face with her handkerchief, calling to him softly as she did so.

Then she saw a slowly spreading stain on his white shirt front. She cried aloud in anguish at the sight, and screamed loudly for help, but the stamping of affrighted horses in the barn, the splash of the stream, the blare of the dance music, drowned her voice.

"Wallis!" she anguished. "Speak to me, speak to me before I leave you!"

But he lay as one dead, except for his uneven, labored breathing. Again and again she screamed for Fonell, for Benton. At last she decided that she must go for them, as they did not hear.

Snatching off her wrap, she bundled it into a pillow, so that she might slip his head from her knee to it while she went for help. As she shifted her weight, he stirred, opened his eyes, and tried to sit up.

"Lie still, dear!" she begged. "You are hurt. I must get help."

"Don't leave me," he replied in a hoarse, vague voice that seemed like an echo out of the past. "You shall never leave me again, beloved!" His right arm was about her, drawing her down for his kiss. "Dream girl, I have you again!" he gloated. "Or have I had you all the time, and only dreamed that you had left me?"

"You've had me since the day I first saw you," she told him. "Now lie still, dear love, while I get some one to carry you into the house."

But he clung to her, and suddenly his kisses were hard, terrible, not at all like the kiss he had just given her on the porch. Feeling that she was living her past over again, she put her hand on his cheek and then on his right

temple. There she found just what his hoarse voice and hard, terrible kisses made her seek—a large mole!

Her heart stood still so long that she wondered if it would ever beat again.

When it did, all the blood seemed to rush to her temples and pulse there until she thought her head would surely burst.

"Say you love me!" Frandin was whimpering. "Say you love me!"

"Love you, my darling, my—husband! If you only knew how much! Do you know that I'm Averil?" she whispered.

"Averil? Did I save her from Slim?"

"You did. You married Averil. Don't you remember?"

"No," he muttered. "No; and yet—oh, it's all so confused! I love her, poor baby child. She's my dream girl, but I don't even know what she looks like. It was dark. Even in my dreams it's always dark," he complained. "If only I could see your face!"

Averil turned her face toward the moon and raised his head. She looked deep into his eyes.

"Ah, now I see—why, you're Teck, my darling Teck! I was dreaming of Averil. Teck, you won't be jealous of little Averil?"

"No, beloved, no!"

"You told me something terrible—terrible—before Evans shot me," he said in his natural voice. "Say it isn't true, Teck! Say that you're not married!"

"But I am married, dearest! I'm married to you—you! I am Averil, your dream girl—Averil, your wife!"

"Thank God!" he breathed and slipped back into oblivion.

Averil moved his head from her arm to the folded wrap and stumbled toward the house, calling for help as she went.

CHAPTER XVI

DR. MILLS found that by good luck the bullet had been deflected by a rib, and that Frandin's wound was not dangerous. It was not the wound, but the fact that he struck his head against the water trough that knocked him out.

Before the doctor had completed his examination, a posse was out searching for Evans. They found him at dawn, snagged in the river, drowned. Afraid to go upstream as far as the ford, he had dared the deep, swift current, but had been thrown from his terrified horse, who was found later in a meadow, peacefully grazing.

Averil's quick, deft fingers carried out Dr. Mills's barked orders perfectly. When at last the doctor pronounced Frandin in no danger, she quietly slipped to the floor in a dead faint.

When she came to she saw Rose sitting by her bedside—Rose with misted eyes, but smiling lips.

"What happened?" asked Averil.

"You fainted, lovey," Rose told her softly. "Feel better?"

"How foolish of me! I never did that before. Wallis—"

"Resting quietly. You do the same." Rose bent and kissed the girl's quivering mouth. "Guess it was an engagement party, after all," she went on happily. "Wally'll be well in time for that Christmas wedding—now, now, honey, don't take on so!" Rose gathered the sobbing girl to her ample bosom. "All's well that ends well."

Averil raised her head.

"That's the truest thing ever said," she answered solemnly, thinking that Rose might never know how true.

When Frandin awakened, it was to intolerable pain. A sharp prick in his arm, and he slipped back into blessed oblivion.

So for days he lived in the gloomy land of half consciousness.

One morning, sitting at his bedside, Averil saw his eyelids flicker and then open. They looked into hers, smiling but still dazed.

"Wallis!" she said softly. "Do you know me?"

"Averil! Not a dream!" he whispered. "Not a dream!"

"Not a dream," she echoed, her eyes ardent, flaming, her soul overflowing with rapture. "Averil, who has loved you always—Averil, whom you married!"

His brows drew together, and he passed a hand over his forehead.

"Strange I didn't realize that," he murmured. "It must be true, though, for it was a minister's house I was seeking when I found you. I know I came into a dimly lit room where there were people who spoke to me. I saw your hair pale gold in the lamplight—"

His voice trailed off.

"Do you remember what happened—after?" Averil asked.

"There was a blank; then a dream—the most wonderful dream. I loved that dream girl as I had never loved a real girl."

"But she's not a dream girl," she reminded him. "See, her lips are warm and real!"

She bent over him and touched her mouth to his. His hand cupped the back of her head, as it had done that night, and he kissed her rapturously, passionately.

Little by little they pieced their story together, until at last they had the miraculous whole.

Wallis, it appeared, had managed to keep his seat on his horse until he got to the highway.

A member of the State constabulary found him in a ditch and took him to a hospital. There he remained for two weeks. Then he went to Chicago, to report to his mother that he had found it impossible to do anything with his half brother, her son by a second marriage. In answer to her anxious questioning he had told her of his illness, calling it a sudden attack of fever, but not mentioning what had happened subsequently.

"I intended," Wallis concluded, "to go back there and try to trace my dream girl, but—I met you, and after that nothing else mattered."

"It was that way with me, too," Averil told him; "but I knew the pain of loving you as well as the ecstasy, for I remembered my wedding."

He held her close to him, murmuring words of love and comfort.

"You'll have two weddings to remember," he added. "We'll have to go through another ceremony, for I'd never feel quite sure about the first."

So Rose knew the bliss of arranging one more wedding and decking out one more beautiful bride.

"I think we ought to christen our valley the Vale of Romance," she said, as she stood watching the wedded couple receive the good wishes and congratulations of their neighbors.

Averil, overhearing, drooped her eyelid at Wallis, who caught her to his heart and kissed her before them all.

THE END

He bowed low. "Your devoted slave, Moonbeam, and growing more so!"

Moonbeam Girl

For one golden hour they found love; he the rich young doctor, she the little fraud—a maid masquerading as her mistress!

By Ellen Newman

WITH the final blare of the music, the masked dancers came to an abrupt stop. They strolled across the ballroom floor, the men escorting their partners to seats.

A sibilant whisper cut across the room, "Look!" Masked faces turned in obedience to the speaker's pointing finger.

A girl was standing there in the open doorway. A slender figure, hesitating, as if uncertain whether to come in or to run away.

Indeed, in her draperies of silver lace, with her head covered with a helmet of silver cloth and her face hidden by a mask, she looked like some night-flying moth poised for flight.

Swiftly a man, masquerading as Robin Hood, went to her, took her hand and led her into the ballroom.

"The next dance is mine, Moonbeam," he said.

"Of course—Mr. Hood," she answered.

"Call me Robin," he suggested. "I'm delighted that you recognized me. I'll venture that not one out of ten girls here to-night ever read the story."

"Then I'll call you Robin, provided you won't be critical of my dancing. I don't know any of the new steps."

"How delightful! Then you won't try to improve my dancing. But tell me, where have you been that you haven't learned the new steps?"

"Oh, there were other things to do," she evaded. "I read better than I dance."

"A girl after my own heart," he laughed. "That probably accounts for the fact that I haven't met you. I never have met you—have I?"

"N-no. We came only yesterday. The invitations to the masked ball arrived this morning."

"Do you mean to tell me that you've been in Mapleton since yesterday morning and I haven't seen you?"

"We're not in Mapleton. We are at the Rockport Springs Hotel."

"We? Don't tell me that the other half of *we* is—a husband?"

Before she could answer a dashing Captain Kidd had touched Robin Hood on the shoulder and taken the girl away from him.

AFTER that the two of them had no chance for private conversation. No sooner had he claimed her as his partner than some rival clapped him on the shoulder and she was gone again. A dozen questions he asked her, but there never was time for answers.

Craftily he maneuvered to be with her when the signal to unmask was given. He whipped off his mask and cowl to expose a shiny black head, square strong features, and a pair of twinkling dark eyes.

He bowed low before the girl.

"Behold, madam, John Hapsworth. Your devoted slave, and growing more so."

He regarded her eagerly. "Now it's your turn," he said, and reached out a hand to unfasten her mask. "If I like the rest of you as well as the first ten chapters I am going to know you better and—"

"No, no!" cried the girl and shrank from his touch. "I dare not! Oh—please—" She turned quickly and ran.

He snatched at her hand to detain her, but she was too quick for him. Her hand slipped free and she was gone, running rapidly through the crowd and disappearing into the summer night.

Back in the ballroom a puzzled and interested young man looked down at a quaint ring that he held in his hand. A girl's ring, a big moonstone with seed pearls set around it.

"Instead of a glass slipper—the only clew," he murmured thoughtfully. "Rockport Springs Hotel. I'll find her!"

IN a taxicab the girl in the silver lace dress was dashing madly to Rockport Springs Hotel. Unmasked now, her face was drawn and white. The night air blew her hair into a riot of auburn curls. She looked back constantly and her eyes were wide and dark with fright.

Arrived at the Rockport Springs Hotel, she paid the driver and rushed into the lobby. She neither paused nor stopped for breath until she had locked herself in a luxurious suite.

Here the girl tore off the beautiful

lace dress and the silken underthings and put on a plain nightgown that was curiously out of keeping with the finery she had just discarded.

She crossed the room to the full-length mirror and faced her reflection. Not a detail of her tumbled hair, of her straight brows, her deep and long-lashed blue eyes, her flushed satin skin, her rounded chin and her slender neck escaped that clear scrutiny.

"Well, Myra Lane," she addressed the image, "I hope you're satisfied. You've used an invitation that did not belong to you, you've worn your mistress's clothes and you've had a good time while she is sick, maybe dying! You fooled a nice young man into thinking that you were a lady instead of a lady's maid. And you escaped discovery by a miracle!"

It was true. Irene Kraull was virtually her mistress. Myra was a distant cousin to whom Irene had given food, shelter and clothing in exchange for more service than her other maids rendered for wages.

Irene had just secured a divorce with satisfactory alimony, and had come to this retreat to taste her freedom. She had scarcely arrived when she was seized with an attack of appendicitis and had been hurried in an ambulance to her home in Atchison. Myra had been left behind to pack and follow with the luggage.

The free evening, the unused invitation to the masked ball, Irene's wardrobe of party dresses, had proved too much of a temptation to Myra. It had been a true masquerade for her.

She was washing her hands when she discovered that Irene's ring was gone, Irene's favorite ring, a moonstone set around with seed pearls!

"Oh, what will happen when Irene misses it?" the girl moaned.

She got into bed at last and lay there a long time shivering with excitement and remorse. But when at last she fell asleep she dreamed of John Hapsworth and his ardent dark eyes caressing his "Moonbeam Girl" in the silver dress.

NEXT morning Myra took the earliest train and left Rockport Springs, on the first lap of her journey to Atchison.

Irene Kraull was very ill for a long time. Myra was too busy to worry much about the lost ring or the stolen masquerade ball.

Long after Irene had recovered she had not missed the ring. There had been so many other things to take her time. Myra knew that some time she would have to confess. But just now she was grateful for the reprieve. She began to breathe again.

One afternoon Irene came home from a call at the hospital where she had gone to visit a friend. Irene was beautiful as a cold, perfectly cut diamond is beautiful. To-day she fairly sparkled.

She said to Myra, "I'm having a guest for tea to-morrow. I wish you'd make some spice cakes."

By that Myra knew that Irene Kraull had met a new man.

Myra baked the cakes and made sandwiches, then helped Irene put on the new blue velvet that made her look gracious as a queen.

In the kitchen with her book she waited until it was time to serve the tea. But to-day she did not read. Instead her thoughts were busy with the woman waiting in the other room.

Irene Kraull had everything: beauty, wealth, friends. Myra sometimes wished to be free, but she owed a debt to the older woman. Irene had given her a home when she was left penniless

and alone. Irene had taken her with her when she traveled. True, Myra had gone in the rôle of a servant, and she had served without wages. But she had had advantages that many other girls who worked for their living did not have.

Myra listened shamelessly. Did it mean he loved her?

Myra did not envy Irene. Rather, she pitied her. She considered Irene's talents, her misspent time and money, a wanton waste. She liked to dream sometimes of what she would do if she had Irene's time, her wealth, her opportunities.

For one thing, she would never have run away in shame from the proffered friendship of the man at the masked ball. She hugged the memory of that one night to her bosom like a precious thing.

Her reverie was cut short by Irene's silvery tones greeting her caller. "Do come in, Dr. Hapsworth!"

Myra shut her eyes. She saw a sleek black head bowed low before her, heard a deep fine voice say, "John Hapsworth, your devoted slave, and growing more so."

"Oh, no!" Myra whispered, rocking her body in accompaniment to the words. "Oh, please, God, don't let him come here to mock me! Don't let him make love to Irene, not where I can see him every day! Oh, don't let it be *my* John Hapsworth!"

But when she heard his voice replying to Irene she knew that it was indeed he.

And, in spite of her prayer, her heart leaped with joy. She would see him again! He would smile his thanks as she served him, perhaps his hand might even touch hers. He would not know her, for he had never seen her un-

masked. Perhaps he would not even remember her had he seen her face. That night had been only an incident in his life, while to her—

SHE got up quickly and lighted the fire under the teakettle, and after a while she went in and passed tea and sandwiches and the favorite spice cakes.

She was demure in her maid's black. Her pulse quickened when he swept her a swiftly appreciative glance. But her well trained hands did not falter. Who was to notice if a little serving girl's face was flushed and her eyes downcast?

Irene called him Dr. Hapsworth, and he talked a good bit about specializing in diseases of the nerves and about going to Vienna to study in the spring. He was doing some special psychological research work at the orphanage and at the Welles Sanitarium. Work about which Irene Kraull asked a great many interested questions.

Dr. Hapsworth was a frequent caller during the next weeks. But he did not make love to Irene. He was very quiet, except when he was prompted to talk about his profession.

Irene went shopping in Kansas City and spent a good bit of time having things done to her face and hair. She practiced on her new friend all the wiles by which she had brought so many other men to her dainty feet, but Dr. Hapsworth remained only a friend.

More than one night after he had gone Irene paced the floor of her bedroom and beat her bosom with clenched fists.

"His work," she raved, "is all he thinks about. I hate his work, and I hate him. He isn't flesh and blood! I hate him!"

It was Myra's part to keep pace beside the older woman, talking to her quietly as one soothes a hysterical child. In her bed at last, Irene always ended her tantrums by weeping from exhaustion.

Myra, pitying Irene even while she despised her for her lack of self-control, secretly exulted. What, she wondered, would Irene have thought if she could have seen Dr. Hapsworth's keen interest in the girl in the silver lace dress? He had found it easy to talk of something besides his profession that night.

Dr. Hapsworth came the last night before his departure for New York, from where he planned to sail abroad. Irene was rouged and freshly marceled. She wore her newest dress of peach chiffon and the necklace of real pearls that had been in her mother's family for many years.

She beckoned her caller to a seat beside her on the divan. He was even quieter than usual—and he did not look at the beautiful woman beside him.

At length she said, "What in the world are you thinking about so solemnly?"

He roused himself with a visible effort, turned toward her. "I was thinking," he said, "that you had been most extraordinarily kind to let me see so much of you. And very patient to listen to my talking—shop."

"Atchison is going to seem dull without you," Irene told him. "But I suppose you won't stay in Europe always?"

"Probably two years."

"Then you'll marry and settle down to a hard practice somewhere?"

"Perhaps." He was staring into the fire again.

"I suppose you have chosen the girl?"

"You will laugh when I tell you that I have met her just once."

"I won't laugh. Tell me." Something dangerous was smoldering in Irene's dark eyes.

"To be exact, I didn't meet her. I danced with her—and I think I fell in love with her. I called her my 'Moonbeam Girl.'"

AT just that moment Myra passed through the hall to hang a forgotten wrap in the closet. She stopped in the shadows to listen shamelessly.

"Sounds interesting," remarked Irene dryly. "Who was she?"

"I never found out. It was a masked ball and she slipped away without taking off her mask. But she left me a token. When I caught her hand to detain her, this slipped off her finger."

He rummaged in his pocket and held up a ring—a ring set with a big moonstone outlined with seed pearls!

Irene gasped. "Why—that's my ring!"

He looked at her with real interest in his eyes. Then the light died and he shook his head slowly.

"You are not my Moonbeam Girl," he said quietly.

Myra Lane's heart threatened to leap right out of her body!

"No," Irene answered, biting her lip with vexation. "When and where did you get this—souvenir?"

"At a masked ball in Mapleton. It was the night of July 11. I remember the date because the next day was my birthday. I traced the girl as far as the Rockport Springs Hotel."

"That explains it. My maid wore the ring. I left her in charge of my luggage at the Rockport Springs Hotel when I was called home unexpectedly. Instead of following me, as I had directed, she disappeared, taking with her all my jewelry and clothing."

"I can scarcely believe that such an alluring girl could have been a thief. I—"

"Oh, she wasn't so altogether charming. It is just as well for your illusion that you did not see her unmasked. She was coarse. She belonged to her class all right—a common servant."

"This girl was not of that type. She was refined and educated. She had traveled, and she was full of fun and wit."

Irene laughed harshly.

"When you find her don't forget that the police of Atchison want her too! If it wasn't my maid, how do you account for the fact that this is my ring?"

"Surely there are other rings like this one."

"How skeptical you are! This ring happens to be a gift from a school friend. It is engraved on the inside, 'From M to I.' Now will you believe me?"

John Hapsworth did not even glance at the ring. "It is indeed marked so," he said quietly.

Myra waited no longer. She had caught a glimpse of Irene's white set lips. She had heard the cold fury in her voice. The minute Dr. Hapsworth left the house Irene would turn on her. And Myra quailed before the rage in the other woman's face.

In panic Myra sped up the stairs to her attic room. She flung her clothing into a shabby suitcase and crept down the back stairs and out of the house.

She walked to the bus depot and bought a ticket to Kansas City. It took nearly all the money she had. She did not even consider what she would

do when she reached the city. The problem was to get away from Atchison and the glaring eyes of Irene Kraull.

Myra sat with her face turned away from the rest of the passengers. And at length the bus stopped at the Kansas City bus terminal.

She sought shelter in the lighted waiting room. There she sat all night long, trying to plan what she would do when it grew light. But she was still too fear-stricken to think. What if Irene had notified the police when she missed her? Any moment now a blue-coated policeman might tap her on the arm and arrest her!

DAWN came and Myra bought a paper and read the advertisements for "Female Help Wanted." Yes, many people were looking for maids. She tore out several of the most promising and, taking up her heavy suitcase, went out into the street.

It was a long day of asking directions, of riding on street cars from one part of the city to another, of tramping blocks and blocks with her heavy suitcase in her hand. All her trouble brought her was weariness and disappointment.

Everywhere she asked for work it was the same:

"Where were you employed last? Whom can you give as a city reference? I am sorry, but you won't do."

At dusk she faced the problem of sleeping quarters for the night. She would take a street car again and inquire her way to the Y. W. C. A. That would offer temporary shelter, and perhaps the secretary would help her find something to do. Yes, she should have gone there first.

While she waited for a street car she sank down on the old suitcase. All day long she had not eaten. There was a haze before her eyes, and she felt faint.

Across the street was a big gray stone building. A traffic sign read: "Hospital. Zone of Quiet." Myra had a sudden inspiration.

She picked up her burden and made her faltering way to the hospital door. A big desk was near the door, and a white-clad woman sat behind it.

Myra saw the woman through a mist and her own voice came to her across a vast space.

"Do you have any—floors to scrub?" she asked.

The woman gave the girl a quick glance.

"Yes, we have lots of floors to scrub," she answered gently. And she came from behind the big desk and put her arm about the swaying little figure.

For Myra, sensing that she had come into a haven, had fainted.

Such was her entrance into the hospital where a new life began for her. She scrubbed floors, washed dishes in the diet kitchen, and finally—she became a nurse in training.

Fear of Irene Kraull left her. But the memory of her old life was like a half-healed scar.

Often she thought worshipfully of Dr. Hapsworth and his interest in her. He had defended her even while Irene had practically proved to him that his Moonbeam Girl was an impostor.

Myra glowed and blossomed. She learned the joy of rendering service that was appreciated. She knew the fun of having friends. Time sped, for Myra was happy.

Then one day, quite without warning, Dr. John Hapsworth walked into the hospital.

He was with Dr. Fitch and he had been called in consultation. He stood for a few minutes talking to Miss Shanlye, the superintendent.

"I am thinking of coming to Kansas City to practice," Myra heard him say. "After all, I am most at home in the West."

MYRA kept her blue gingham back turned, and Dr. Hapsworth passed on into the elevator without glancing at the student nurse who sat writing at the hall desk. But the girl's heart bounded and raced with an emotion that frightened her.

That night she consulted her mirror. She had changed. The careful diet, the atmosphere of friendliness had made her over. It had been two years since Dr. Hapsworth had seen her as Irene's maid. Other people from Atchison had been in the hospital and they had not recognized her. She felt quite secure in her decision that Dr. Hapsworth would not recall her.

For Myra, the other doctors ceased to exist. Not that Dr. Hapsworth was aware of her. He was very busy now. There was no trace left of the gay young masquerader who had danced with a girl in a silver dress. Already he had the reputation of being an authority on brain and nerve diseases.

Myra was in her last year of training, and it sometimes fell to her lot to stand beside the operating table and pass instruments into his skillful hands. She looked eagerly forward to the days when it would be her turn to help Dr. Hapsworth.

Not that Myra gave any sign of her feeling. She kept away from Dr. Hapsworth. She had a poor opinion of the nurses who ran after the doctors. Besides, what could knowing Dr. Hapsworth bring her but hurt?

Very gently the doctor put his arms about her. "She is my Moonbeam Girl," he said

Then a wonderful thing happened. Dr. Hapsworth had a critical operation to perform. It was not Myra's day to assist him. She was standing by the sterilizer when he came into the operating room. He looked about vaguely as if he were searching for something and scarcely knew what it was.

At last his eyes found Myra, rested there.

"You will assist me," he said.

Myra's world turned upside down. As she stepped to his side she hoped that her elation did not show in her face. She hoped that her leaping heart would not jump right out of her body. And that night she sank on her knees beside her narrow bed.

"He chose me," she whispered. "Another time he chose me! Oh, God, keep me humble. Amen."

After that it was taken for granted that nobody else was to assist Dr. Hapsworth. Nightly Myra lectured herself sternly. "He never sees you as a pretty girl. He prefers you because you are a quick-fingered machine and because you never follow him about."

Yet sometimes he looked at her long and steadily. Once he said: "I like to look at you." He smiled his quiet friendly smile into her eager little face as he spoke.

Myra knew an exquisite misery that was somehow akin to bliss.

The time came for Myra to be graduated.

She was assisting Dr. Hapsworth for the last time before her graduation when he detained her a moment. "I'm going to miss you," he told her. "But I wish you the best of luck."

"Thank you."

"But I'll see you sometimes?"

"I hope we'll be on the same cases now and then."

To Myra's vague disappointment, he let it go at that.

The next week an Atchison paper bore a society note that Dr. Hapsworth had been the guest of Irene Kraull.

IT was a month later that Dr. Hapsworth called Myra one night. "I have a very serious case from out of town," he said. "Will you take it?"

Myra agreed, although she had just come in from a tedious case.

"I'll call for you in half an hour."

When he came he talked about the case and his plans for treatment. Myra caught only phrases.

"Injury to the brain—automobile accident three days ago—means an operation—hard time to pull through."

Myra was having difficulty in keeping her mind off those ten brown fingers that gripped the steering wheel. And then he turned and looked full at her. "I need a nurse who is particularly alert and conscientious, and so I sent for you."

"Thank you," she smiled. "I'll do my best." How could she tell him that she wanted him to call her something more than alert and conscientious? She, whose secret lay buried deep in her heart!

They were climbing the steps of the hospital now. They were at the door of the patient's room. The nurse by the bed was making way for Myra and the doctor. Dr. Hapsworth went into the hall to consult his patient's chart.

Myra hung up her wraps. She turned to the bed and bent over the patient.

And then she stumbled back, a hand over her mouth to stifle the cry that rose to her lips.

The sick woman was Irene Kraull!

Myra was quite composed by the time Dr. Hapsworth entered the room. Mechanically she had assumed charge of the case. She heard his instructions and he went away.

Alone with Irene Kraull, all through the long night the slim little nurse fought two battles: one with death and one with herself. When morning came she had routed one enemy. Whatever the consequences to herself, she was going

to stay by Irene. Irene was blood kin and in need of her.

Myra saw the other through new and pitying eyes. Barely thirty, Irene looked old and haggard. Her very wealth had cheated her out of the worthwhile things. The pride of accomplishment, the joy of service, had been lost to her.

Dr. Hapsworth came that morning and looked a silent question at Myra. Then he looked at her again. Her face was pale and drawn. But in her eyes there was something new, something that held him. She was more than beautiful.

As he was going, he hesitated. "Miss Lane," he said. "Myra—I am afraid this case is going to be too much for you. Better let me get somebody to relieve you."

Myra faced him with a fierce little gesture. "Please. It is my case."

"Very well. It is your case." The straight glance that accompanied the words was neither professional nor impersonal. It was as if he had seen beyond the nurse's uniform to the woman for the first time.

Myra faced the days ahead unflinchingly. When Irene gained consciousness she would recognize her. Myra knew that she would take pleasure in exposing her to Dr. Hapsworth.

Irene's operation was successful. When she first opened her eyes consciously she looked into her nurse's face and said, "Myra."

And, clinging to Myra's hand, she fell asleep.

Irene mended rapidly. She was an exacting patient as she had been an overbearing mistress. She did not mention the past nor ask Myra how she happened to be her nurse.

Once she said, "Why are you so kind to me?"

And Myra answered, "Because I am your nurse and because you gave me a home when I needed it."

Irene's room was full of flowers. Every day a fresh bouquet came from a certain David Swisher.

"David wants to marry me," Irene said to Myra. "He's not a bad sort—and he's rich."

When Irene could sit up she took great satisfaction in her beautiful negligees. She looked forward to Dr. Hapsworth's visits and was always happiest when he was there. But she was very quiet. The old hard gayety was gone.

Irene was watching Myra and John Hapsworth. Her half closed eyes missed none of the young doctor's interest when he talked to the white clad nurse.

She saw in Myra's face and gestures the palpitant eagerness that Myra herself fancied she concealed so cleverly.

And all the time Myra waited for Irene to strike.

One morning the little nurse met Dr. Hapsworth in the hall and they walked into Irene's room together, laughing. At sight of Irene's drawn face, Myra knew that the time had come.

IRENE'S tortured face twisted itself into a crooked smile. "John," she began, "did Myra ever tell you that she is my cousin? Well, she is. It was Myra who wore that funny ring of mine to a certain masked ball in Mapleton. She forgot to tell me about it, and so I took it for granted that it was part of the maid's loot."

Myra gasped. Exposed! But not in

the way she had anticipated. Her head drooped on her bosom, hiding her telltale blushes.

John Hapsworth turned swiftly to the girl. "Myra—darling, look at me."

Slowly she raised her head, her eyes met his and clung there.

Very gently the young man put his arms about her, drew her close and secure against his heart.

"Myra—dear—no wonder I've been falling in love with you the last year!"

"John," cut in Irene's cool voice, "take her for a ride and stop making a love scene in my room. You can tell him what you like, Myra. But if I were you I'd tell him the exact truth."

Myra was beside Irene, kissing her. "Yes, Irene, yes! You've made it easy. Oh, you don't know what you've done for—for us!"

Irene pushed her away. "Be off on your ride," she said harshly. "But, first, Myra, set that vase of yellow chrysanthemums this way."

And Myra knew that her cousin would marry the man who loved her.

John—always he would be beside her, his love making for them both a broad, shining way to the land of happiness eternal.

She slipped her hand in his, and as they gained the sanctuary of the car his lips sought and found the willing lips of his Moonbeam Girl—his sweetheart for always.

Good Night's Door

IT was just for a moment we stopped at the door,
In dim twilight;
And we halted, and stammered, and said no more
Than just—"Good night."

Yet now I can think of a host of things
We meant to say;
And the words come as fast as if they had wings,
When we're away.

For I've crowned him King Love. But how can he know
What I think aright—
When the best we can do is to stammer so,
And say—"Good night?"

—*S. Raymond Jocelyn.*

"You're hungry now," she accused him. "Aren't you?"

Message of a Rose

One woman he loved killed his hopes; another brought back his dreams—but was he too late?

By Eric Howard

"KIND-HEARTED," he said. "H-m! We shall see!"

Denis Rogers watched the long-nosed car as it swung up the driveway. The girl at the wheel applied the brakes and the car skidded dangerously.

"Must be angry at something," Denis considered. "Or perhaps it's just her natural recklessness."

The entrance gate was closed. In order to drive into the estate and to the garage, she would have to get out and open it. Infernal nuisance, that gate! If her father would only install the kind that opened automatically—

She was opening the door when Denis got to his feet. He held up a hand and smiled amiably.

"I'll open it," he offered.

And proceeded to do so, standing aside for the car to shoot past. The girl nodded her thanks, but didn't speak. He observed a certain defiant insolence in her triangular face; a trace of stubborn pride, perhaps.

The car passed him, in second gear, but at a high speed, and he waved lazi-

ly, to indicate that he would gladly close the gate. But the girl abruptly applied the brakes for a second time, and turned round.

"Who are you?" she demanded, inspecting him. "Working here?"

She saw a tall, somewhat angular, lazy-looking young man. He strolled toward her at a leisurely pace, and leaned against the fender of her car.

He removed a shabby felt hat, and smiled. His face was rather gaunt and a little pale.

She observed, also, that there was a red rose stuck into the hatband of his battered headgear. His clothing was threadbare, and fitted loosely. Perhaps when he was not so very thin it fitted well.

"Working? No," he replied to her question. "No; just resting. The sun was too hot for me. Your rose-covered wall provided shade. Nice day, isn't it? In the shade, I mean."

As he spoke he watched her. She was inspecting him with frankly curious eyes. He noted that her eyes were blue—a stormy blue, just now—with unbelievably long lashes.

"Are you just wandering?" she asked curiously. "Aren't you going anywhere?"

"Nowhere that I know of," he remarked with a smile. "Yes, just wandering. A sort of tramp, you know. Oh, in search of work, of course. Of course!"

"But—how do you live?" she demanded, with characteristic directness.

He shrugged lazily. "Life at best is uncertain. One encounters meals, somehow, although they may be some distance apart. And places to sleep. In this kind of weather, barring rain, the woods offer excellent shelter."

"I shouldn't like the distance between meals," she laughed.

When she laughed a warmth crept into her eyes, her mouth softened, and that look of stubborn pride was gone. In its place there was mirth, tenderness and tolerance.

"I don't like it, either," he admitted. In spite of himself, he trembled a little. It was the devil, thinking about food!

A LOOK of shock crossed the face of the girl.

"You're hungry now!" she accused him. "Aren't you?"

"Well, since you mention it," he smiled, "I believe I am."

"Hop on the running board," she said decisively. "We'll see what we can find."

As he obeyed, the rose in his hatband fell at the girl's side. It was an exquisite red rose, more than a bud, but not yet full blown.

"With my compliments," he said. "It's your rose, anyway."

She smiled and picked it up, placing it in the jacket of her tan sports outfit. Halting the car at the rear of the rambling house, opposite the garage, she indicated that he was to follow her.

She entered a screened porch and proceeded into a large, tiled kitchen.

"Sit down," said the girl abruptly. "I'll investigate the refrigerator."

He obeyed. As a matter of fact, it was difficult for him to stand, just now. His own weakness, as well as the heat of the sun, had caused him to lie down out there—that, and a rather forlorn hope.

He observed her swift, direct movements. She was very graceful, very well poised.

She placed dishes and food before him; quantities of food. A quart of milk, a platter of cold meat, a plate of bread, cheese, sliced tomatoes, fruit.

He remembered that he had eaten his last meal about twenty-four hours ago.

"Help yourself," she said.

"I'm grateful. You *are* kind-hearted." He nodded, as if to himself.

She laughed scornfully. "It doesn't take a kind heart to supply food to a hungry man. Just one grain of decency—a very slight one."

"But it's rare for all that," he assured her.

"Is it? In that case, if I were in your shoes I'd steal the food I needed."

"I believe you would," he chuckled. "No doubt I shall in time."

"Tell me how it happens that a man like you, educated, intelligent, capable, is a tramp?"

"A brief tale, quickly told," he replied. "Folly, misfortune, failure, and disillusionment—quite a lot of folly, some misfortune, heaps of failure and enough disillusionment to cap the rest. However, fresh air and the open road and meeting kind-hearted people like yourself, ma'am, are helping the disillusionment. I have no doubt that it will be cured."

"Do you want work?"

"Yes—and no," he admitted, grinning. "I want the fruits of labor, yes; but I don't feel up to doing a good job of anything."

"You could work here, if you wanted to," she suggested. "We have an old gardener. He needs an assistant. The work isn't too hard, or it needn't be at first. It would be just looking after the garden, irrigating, and perhaps washing the cars now and then. Salary, adequate. Quarters above the garage. If you want it, wait until my father comes and talk to him about it."

"You are more than kind-hearted," he assured her. "I'll wait. But I doubt if your father will hire me. I have no references."

"What's your name?"

"Denis Rogers."

"You needn't tell father you're a sort of tramp. Tell him you heard that he could use another man on the place, and that you've come to apply. If you make a good impression, he will not ask for references."

"But aren't you taking a chance?" asked the man. "I might be almost anything, a criminal, perhaps."

"So you might," she nodded. "But what sort of criminal would be lying under a rose-covered wall, hungry?"

"Not a very successful one, I guess," he grinned.

"No. When you've eaten all you want, you might put my car up. Then come around to the front veranda, and wait for father. He'll be here soon."

"Thank you."

The girl nodded briskly and left him alone in the kitchen. He smiled to himself. He continued to eat for some time, slowly, making the most of each morsel.

When he had put her car in the garage he stood for a moment looking at the house. Not elaborate, it was a picture of comfort, peace, seclusion. The acre surrounding it was beautifully gardened, with lawns and flowers and shrubs under old live oak trees. The land farther removed was devoted to orange, grapefruit and walnut trees.

Denis took a coin from his pocket. It was a last coin, a nickel. He tossed it into the air, and let it fall to the graveled driveway.

"Heads I stay, tails I go!" he murmured.

It was heads.

THEN he went around to the veranda. The girl was there, seated at a small writing desk. She had changed her clothes, and was now

wearing something very light and airy, in a material figured with flowers. She looked up thoughtfully, and he met her deep blue eyes. He thought she looked a little sad.

"Come in and sit down," she nodded. "You'll find books and magazines there."

He did as she suggested, silently picking up a book. His eyes rested briefly, but hungrily, on a box of cigarettes. The girl, seeing his expression, turned back to the letter she was writing. After a moment of pen scratching, without looking up, she said: "There are cigarettes there, I think. Help yourself."

"Oh, thank you," he murmured, flushing a little.

She went on writing. The book he had selected awakened painful memories. It was a book he had read with Crystal, one he had given her. He put it down and took up a magazine.

Turning the pages, he came to a large photograph. His eyes rested morosely on it. He studied it dispassionately. It was a photograph of Crystal. She was wearing a necklace he had given her.

He stared at the photograph for a long time, wondering that his feelings were no more deeply involved. They weren't involved at all, he discovered. It might have been the photograph of a stranger.

He was suddenly aware that the girl had stopped writing. He looked up and saw her fold the letter and insert it in an envelope.

"There!" she said, sealing it with a thump of her tiny fist.

They heard a car approaching.

"That's father," said the girl. "If you want work, I'm sure he'll give it to you. I forgot to tell you—my name's Claire Dunne. Father's George Dunne. I'll tell him what you want and let you talk to him."

Presently, a round-faced, gray-haired man appeared. His eyes were blue like the girl's, and in them was a pleasant, friendly expression. He looked inquiringly at Denis and back to Claire for an explanation.

"Hello, dad," said Claire. "This man came to see about work. His name's Rogers."

Denis had risen and shook hands with the older man. The girl went into the house.

"I understand you need a second man to help with the garden," said Denis.

"I guess we do. Sit down, Mr. Rogers, sit down."

"I'm not very experienced," said Denis. "But I need work, and the matter of salary—er, wages—doesn't matter."

Mr. Dunne nodded pleasantly.

"There's a room over the garage," he said. "McPherson, the gardener, has one there too. You'll get along with Mac, I think. Mrs. Reilly, our cook, will see that you get plenty to eat. Pretty thin, aren't you?"

"I've been sick for a while," said Denis. "I'll put on a few pounds soon. Thank you for the chance."

Mr. Dunne waved his hand.

"Just put your things in the room up there," he said. "Then look up Mac. He's around somewhere. He'll tell you what to do in the morning."

Mr. Dunne went into the house, and Denis wandered off toward the garage.

"My things!" he laughed to himself. "I'll have to wash this shirt to-night."

He ate another hearty meal in the kitchen, later, sitting opposite McPherson, served by the genial Mrs. Reilly. Afterward he sat with McPherson on a bench in front of the garage. The

gardener had given him a corncob pipe and a supply of tobacco.

After McPherson had gone upstairs, Denis still sat there, smoking. The odor of orange blossoms in the foggy air was very fragrant.

Out of the shadows appeared a light, slender form.

"Oh, Mr. Rogers," said Claire abruptly, "I'm afraid father forgot to give you an advance. Here!"

She thrust a bill into his hand.

"You may need some things. You can run into town in the morning, I shan't be using my car, and get what you need."

"But—"

"You can repay me when father pays you," she said. "Good night."

"Good night."

THE work with McPherson was pleasant and by no means exhausting. For the first week, however, Denis fell into a heavy sleep immediately after he had eaten dinner, and did not awaken until dawn. He gained five pounds in that time, and his pallor left him. He saw very little of Claire. Sometimes her friends came to see her, other girls and men, but more often she drove away in her car.

McPherson was as silent as the Sphinx, but they got on very well together. Mrs. Reilly was very talkative.

"Her young man's here for dinner," she whispered one night. "La, the course of true love never do run smooth, do it now?"

"Why do you say that?" asked Denis.

"La, how they've fought! I've heard 'em, a time or two. Engaged they were, but Miss Claire broke it off. Now maybe they'll get engaged again."

"He's not the man for a lass like her," observed McPherson.

"And who is, indeed?" demanded Mrs. Reilly.

"Who, indeed?" echoed Denis.

Later, when he was sitting on the bench before the garage, McPherson having gone upstairs, Claire and the man came out.

"Rogers, this is Mr. Andrews. He's going back to town. Will you go with him and drive the car back?"

Denis nodded.

"I'll drive," growled Andrews, taking his place at the wheel. "To-morrow afternoon, Claire?"

"I'll phone you," she promised. "Good night."

Denis got in beside Andrews. As the latter switched on the lights he caught a glimpse of his heavy, stubborn face. Just now he seemed angry.

They sped down the highway, Andrews driving very fast, and neither man spoke.

"Cigar?" asked Andrews abruptly, as he lighted one for himself.

"No, thank you, I'll stick to these," replied Denis, indicating his cigarette.

Andrews glanced at him. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Rogers."

"Oh, yes. Want to earn some extra money?"

"How?" asked Denis.

Andrews slowed down and looked at him again. "I'm going to marry Claire," he announced harshly. "I've made up my mind on that. But she—well, she's acting queer. I'd like to know who she sees—the men, I mean. Somebody is trying to win her. She's mine!"

Denis said nothing.

"I'll give you a hundred dollars if you'll tell me who calls on her," offered Andrews.

"Sorry," said Denis. "I couldn't do that, of course. It's none of my business. I'm a gardener, not a spy."

Andrews snorted. "Gardener!" he scoffed. "Yes, you're a gardener! You talk like one—I don't think! What's the idea?"

"Perhaps there isn't any. I may not be much of a gardener, but that's my profession."

"How much does Dunne pay you?"

"Forty dollars and board," said Denis. "Excellent board, too."

"You could use a hundred dollars, couldn't you?"

"No, I don't need it."

"Bah! Maybe you have an idea—maybe you think that Claire—"

"I know my place, Mr. Andrews," laughed Denis, interrupting. "I'm a gardener."

Andrews growled something inaudible.

They drove to a hotel and Andrews surrendered the car to Denis.

"If you change your mind," suggested Andrews, "let me know and the hundred is yours."

"No chance," said Denis, shaking his head. "Good night."

He swung the car around and headed directly back to the estate. Andrews's surly jealousy and offer of a bribe had given him something to think about. He wondered about Claire. Was she really in love with this man? How could she be? Yet love was a strange, uncertain thing. He had been in love with Crystal, certainly, and Crystal possessed a temper quite as surly and unruly as Andrews. You could never tell about love; it struck anywhere and did strange things to people.

HE observed, however, that the next day, which was Sunday, Claire remained at home. If she had telephoned Andrews, she had cancelled their tentative appointment. Two of her girl friends were there for luncheon, but no other man called.

Late in the afternoon she came up to Denis, who was sprawled under an oak tree, reading.

"I'm going to the beach for a swim," she announced. "Want to go? I don't feel like driving."

"Of course," he nodded, jumping to his feet.

"There are some bathing suits in that closet. Maybe you can find one that will fit you."

The beach was only a few miles away. It was owned by the club of which she and her father were members. They changed into their swimming suits and met on the sand.

"You swim, of course?" asked Claire.

He nodded. "Fairly well."

She ran ahead of him, plunging into the water and swimming toward a raft some distance out. He watched her with a quickening of his pulses, remembering a scene in which Crystal had figured—lounging on another beach, refusing to enter the water. He shook his head and muttered to himself: "Don't be a fool!"

He followed her into the water, overtook her before she reached the raft, and climbed aboard. As she came up he extended his hand and pulled her up beside him. The water glistened on her round, tan shoulders, down her slender arms. She shook herself and smiled. He resisted an impulse to tell her that she was beautiful, remembering what he was—"a sort of tramp."

If there was any disillusionment left in him, its place was now taken by a determination of the sort he had thought he would never feel again. He laughed at himself. Ambition and hope, which had betrayed him before, were driving him; despite all resolu-

tions, he was now willing to accept their domination. He nodded to himself.

"What are you thinking about so seriously?" she asked.

He flushed. "An idea struck me," he explained. "Foolish, perhaps, but I think I'll give it a fling."

He looked at her so intently that she turned away, and a moment later dived into the water.

He watched her from the raft as she swam. His heart beat exultantly, while his mind played with the idea that had come to him.

It did not occur to him that she could be in danger, although she was swimming far out, until he saw her sink. He heard a faint cry, and instantly plunged into the water, swimming toward her. Occupied with his thoughts, idly watching her, he had not known how much time had passed. The water was cold, too cold for a long swim. Now—

HE heard her second cry, and a little later reached her side. He was breathing hard, for although he swam well he had not yet recovered his full strength. She reached for him, slipping her arm over his shoulder.

"Hang on, like this!" he said, showing her how. "Don't struggle. Just let me tow you in. All right now?"

"Cramps," she whispered. Her face showed her pain. "Never happened before."

"We'll be in soon," he assured her. "Easy does it."

Taking a deep breath, he swam for the raft, towing her with him.

When they reached the raft she was strong enough to pull herself up. He hung on to the side, gasping for air. She helped him aboard, and he lay down at full length, while his heart hammered and his lungs hurt.

She knelt beside him. "I'm sorry," she said. "That was a tough strain for you. I'm all right now."

"Sure?" he asked.

She nodded. Her eyes had that gentle, tender look that he had seen in them before. He tried to sit upright, but was a little too weak to make it. She slipped her arm under his head and lifted him up. Irresistibly his head rested for a moment against her shoulder. He could not bring himself to remove it, even after he had regained his wind. Her nearness, her sweetness overpowered him.

"Claire!" he whispered, his arm slipping around her waist. "Claire, dear!"

He kissed her. He couldn't help it. His lips clung to hers, his arms held her as if he could never let her go. He kissed her again and again, imprisoning her in his arms.

"Don't!" she gasped. "Please don't!"

Her hands were beating against him, she was weeping. Instantly repentant, he released her.

"Oh, I'm sorry!" he told her. "I—Honestly, I had no thought of doing that. It just—happened. I am sorry—sorry I shocked and hurt you."

"I'm going ashore now," she said, confused, refusing to meet his eyes.

She slipped into the water and he followed. He watched her walk to the clubhouse, and went off to change his own clothes. Later, when he had taken his place in the car, he saw her sitting at a table on the veranda, having tea with several others. He turned away, frowning, and smoked a cigarette.

When she joined him, to go home, she cut off his renewed apology.

"Let's not mention it, Rogers," she

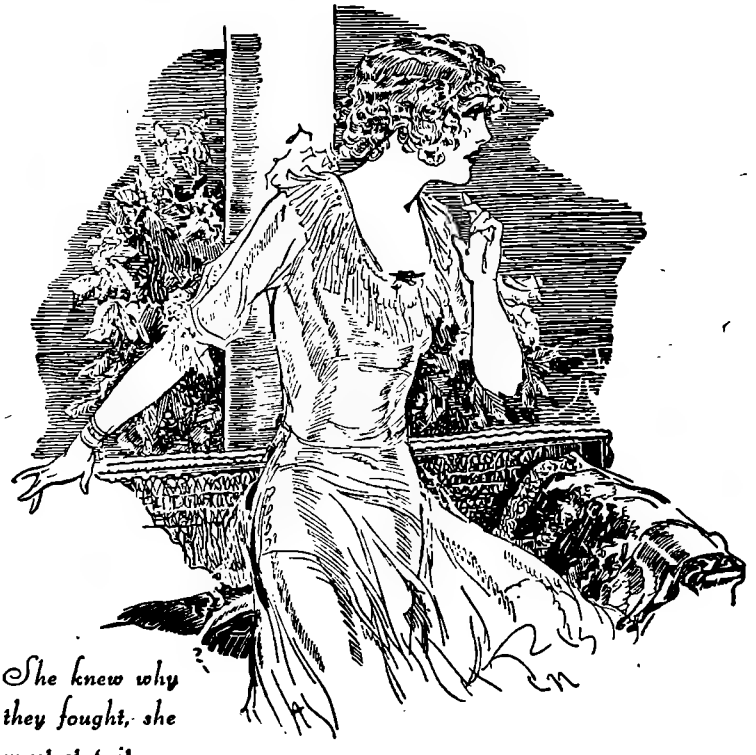
said coldly, in the tone of one addressing a servant.

He flushed and stammered: "I'll leave, Miss Dunne. I'm very sorry; but before I leave I must tell you that that was not a moment's madness. I love you. I love you with all my heart. It sounds absurd, no doubt, but I mean it. Some time, perhaps, I'll have a chance to prove it. But since I'm—what I am, I'll not embarrass you by staying."

"There's no reason why you should leave," she said, after a moment. "Father likes you, and McPherson says you're a good worker. You need the job. Stay."

"But—"

"We'll just forget the rest—what you've done and said," she remarked. "Forget it entirely."



She knew why they fought, she must stop it

HE saw very little of her during the subsequent weeks. He purposely avoided her, and he thought that she avoided him. Andrews came out often, and Mrs. Reilly reported that she was sure they were engaged again.

Denis retired to his room shortly after dinner each evening, and his light burned until very late. The determination, the renewed hope and ambition, that had come to him demanded expression, even though there were times when it seemed hopeless.

A month after the episode at the beach, during which time they had exchanged only a dozen words, he drove McPherson to town one morning to purchase some garden supplies. He took with him a large, thick packet which he carried to the express office. Having dispatched it, he came out whistling, in a more cheerful mood than he had enjoyed for some time.

Back at the estate, he worked and waited, and continued to avoid Claire. Andrews came more often. Mrs. Reilly reported that they did not quarrel now.

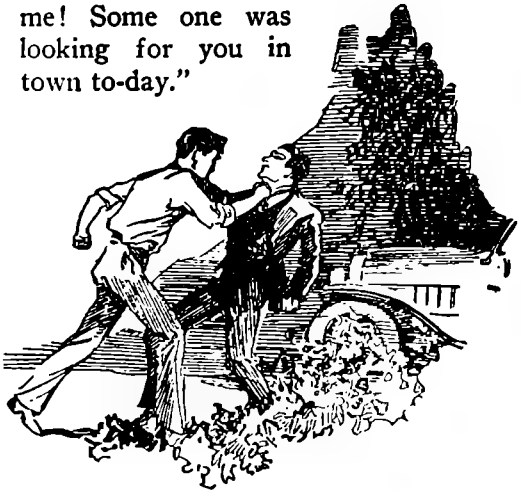
He encountered Andrews directly only once. The suitor stopped his car inside the gate, where Denis was working, and called him over.

"You're not a gardener, and you know it. Who and what are you?"

Andrews's heavy, rather brutal jaw was thrust out.

Denis smiled at him and shrugged. "Nobody and nothing," he remarked.

"You can't fool me! Some one was looking for you in town to-day."



Denis started. "Who was it?" he asked.

"Never mind," laughed Andrews. "They're after you. You'd better clear out."

Denis shook his head. "I'm not wanted, if that's what you're driving at. If anybody was looking for me it was for some other reason."

"Well, I told them where to find you!" chuckled Andrews.

"Them?" repeated Denis. "Impossible! You're lying."

Furiously angry, Andrews leaped from his car.

"Nobody can call me a liar," he blustered. "I'll show you!"

He charged Denis, head down. Surprised, Denis shot out his fist. By some miracle of chance or skill it encountered Andrews's jaw. His charge was checked as he slumped to the ground.

"Rogers!" cried Claire, who must have seen all of the encounter. "What have you done?"

She ran up to his side.

"He ran into it," he said quietly. "I didn't really hit him. I'm always doing the wrong thing—I should have gone before. I will now."

"I suppose so," she observed. "I suppose you're always that way, always running away from things."

He lifted Andrews to his feet, deposited him on the running board of the car, and, picking up the hose he had been using, shot a torrent of water into his face.

Claire gasped.

Andrews shook himself and stood up, growling. Seeing Claire, he made some half-hearted threat to Denis, who was walking away.

Claire very easily stopped Andrews by placing her hand on his arm.

"You've got to get rid of that fellow, Claire! He's insolent and worse. Somebody's looking for him, too. There's no knowing what he's been, or done. Probably a criminal. I'd thrash him if—"

"I wouldn't try it—again," she commented dryly.

"You've treated me rotten ever since he arrived on the scene," protested Andrews. "Who is he? Where'd he come from? What is he to you, that's what I'd like to know!"

"If you're going to be ridiculous again—"

Another car was entering the open gate.

They turned as it stopped, and saw a very beautiful woman descend from it. She hurried across the lawn to them.

"Is Denis Rogers here?" she asked.

"Yes, he's here," said Andrews, pointing toward the garage. "You'll find him over there."

The woman nodded and hurried off in the direction indicated.

Andrews took Claire's arm and they followed.

DENIS was polishing Claire's car. He wore his khaki trousers, a woolen shirt and no hat.

"Denis!" cried the beautiful woman, flying to him and flinging herself into his arms.

"Crystal!" he groaned. "Who—how did you know I was here?"

"Oh, Denis," she cried, "I've been so wretched, so unhappy, without you! Darling boy, forgive me! I didn't know what I said or did. I was mad. Oh, it's good to see you!"

She made an attempt to kiss him, but he seized her shoulders and held her off.

"You've seen Armistead, eh?" he asked, smiling sarcastically. "You've heard something."

Her eyes wavered.

"Yes," she admitted, "I did see Army. He couldn't tell me where you were, but I found out. I saw your script on his desk. Your address was on it."

He laughed.

"And what else?" he demanded.

"I love you! Oh, how I love you! I can't bear to lose you!"

"Bosh!" said Denis. "Tell me the rest. What did Army say about the play?"

"Nothing! I wasn't interested in that! I just had to come to you, just as fast as I could come."

"Sorry, Crystal, I don't believe you. The play must be good or you wouldn't be here. You know you have no time for failures."

"Denis, don't be so cruel! I never meant that."

Claire was making an effort to move away, but Andrews held her.

"Oh," said Denis, looking away from Crystal, "this is Miss Crystal Wood, Miss Dunne, Mr. Andrews."

They bowed and nodded.

"That actress," said Andrews. "I saw her in some play or other."

He was about to say more, probably derogatory to Denis, when a uniformed lad on a very noisy motor cycle shot up the driveway.

"Mr. Rogers here? Telegram, mister. Sign here, please!"

Denis opened the message and read:

> Play great Stop Open in a month Stop Come back for rehearsals Stop Sold stock rights on other play and am holding money for you plus advance on this Stop Wire if you need Stop Beware of brunettes Stop The diamond digger is after you since she learned this play is a wow.

He nodded to himself and looked again at Crystal. "So you did know?" he laughed.

"What if I did?" she exclaimed. "I love you, Denis!"

"Chuck it, Crystal! Or save it for the stage. That line lost its effectiveness long ago. Good-by."

He offered his hand, smiling at her. After one bitter glance, she turned and walked back to her car. He shrugged. It was curious that he had no feeling about her.

Well, he still had to leave here, where he had done so many wrong things, where he had failed again. He'd leave now.

He walked up to his room above the garage and began to pack his few belongings. Looking down, he saw Claire and Andrews walking toward the house.

Considerably later he heard a motor start, and looked down to see Andrews leaving.

He wanted to see Claire again, if

only for a moment. He couldn't leave without seeing her.

HE found her on the veranda.

"May I come in?" he asked.

"Of course," she said.

He was wearing that old tweed suit in which she had first seen him. It fitted well now, for he had put on considerable weight.

"I'm going away," he said. "I wanted to say good-by, and to thank you for everything. I'll always think of this as a sort of home. And I'm sorry about the things I've done to displease you. I'm sorry about to-day, about Andrews, and all that."

She said nothing. She was holding a small book in her hands. He recognized it as a copy of Sonnets from the Portuguese, which he had seen her reading before.

"And I want to wish you happiness," he went on. "I— Will you tell your father good-by for me? He's been fine, too."

Still she said nothing. She was clasping the book in her hands. Her hands were very white. Now, as he moved a step nearer the door, she stood up. The book fell between them, and as he stooped to recover it a dried rose, unmistakably red, dropped from its pages.

Her face crimsoned and she would have snatched the book from him. But he held it, and looked at the rose.

"I think I know this rose," he said softly. "Why have you kept it, Claire?"

She turned away. She was trembling.

"Oh, you are blind!" she cried.

He reached for her, took her in his arms, and held her close to him.

"Claire!" he cried. "My darling Claire! But how was I to know?"

For answer she kissed him.

"But Andrews—" he began.

"Sh!" whispered Claire. "Let's talk of us! I'm not asking you about that very beautiful girl who came to-day."

"But I want to tell you," he insisted. "She played in a thing I wrote. I was in love with her, or anyway, I thought I was. But when I had two failures, and was sick, she said she had no time for failures. That hurt. She came back to-day, because it seems that I'm to have another success."

"We've both been unlucky," said Claire. "Andrews wanted to marry me to get father as his partner."

"We're both lucky now!"

"Yes! Now and always!"

"And always!" he echoed. "An old tramp told me about you at first. He said you were kind-hearted. He described your place. When I got here I was pretty weak, and I decided to try your kind heart."

"Bless that old tramp!" said Claire, her arms about him. "That day in the surf—I loved you then. But I was afraid, or too proud, to admit it. Then, when you didn't speak again, I thought — I thought you were really going away just now."

"And you would have let me go?"

"No, I couldn't! If the rose hadn't given me away I'd have stopped you somehow. Oh, Denis, I'll keep this rose forever."

Their lips met in a pledge for all eternity.

Handwriting and Happiness

By JOHN FRASER

JOHN FRASER, gifted handwriting expert, who has made a name for himself both in his native England and here in America, will analyze your handwriting. If you wish to know whether your sweetheart is the right man for you to marry, inclose samples of your own and your sweetheart's handwritings and address your letter to Mr. Fraser, care "Service for Sweethearts." If you wish his help in finding the profession for which you are best fitted, address him care "Your Career." For general reading, care "Character Analysis."

You may take advantage of one or any service, but a coupon must accompany each request for handwriting analysis. Coupon will be found at the end of this department.

Mr. Fraser bases his judgments on the scientific rules of graphology. In no case does he forecast the future or attempt to reveal the past. Scientific graphology undertakes only to reveal the inner secrets of your nature.

As many answers will be given on these pages as space permits. All other questions will be answered by mail. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany your request for analysis.

I SUPPOSE it is simply force of habit that makes people finish their letters with these words: "hoping to hear from you by return mail." In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred I receive the same request daily from my correspondents.

Now, girls, I grant you that waiting indefinitely for something you are anxious to receive is nothing short of exasperating, but, on the other hand, when you write to me don't imagine that yours is the only letter that comes to my desk in the morning!

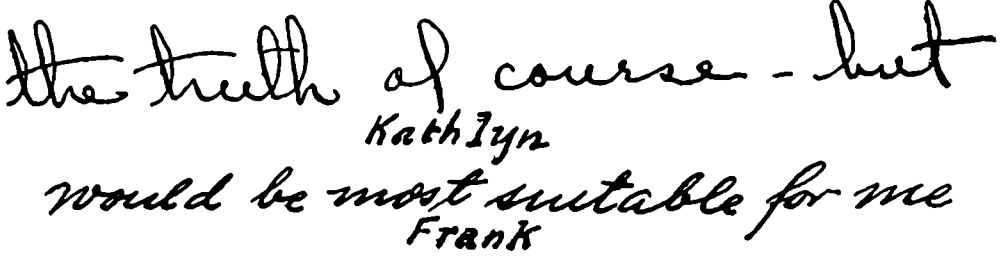
Though conscientiousness is one of my strongest characteristics, according to my handwriting, it is a physical impossibility to comply literally wth your wishes. I do try my hardest, however, to put you out of suspense by sending

my analysis within a few days after receiving your letter. You could also facilitate matters considerably by simply asking *one* question instead of ten.

Remember that, will you?

SERVICE FOR SWEETHEARTS

(Miss Mary J., Carbondale, Ill.) After studying your samples carefully, I think that matrimony will be easy sailing for you, Mary. That is to say, Archie is such a decent sort of chap he wouldn't for the world cause you an hour's unhappiness if he could avoid it. Of course, like the rest of us, he is a man who has his little foibles which keep him out of the angelic class! Two things you'll have to be careful about, Mary, after the honeymoon is over. Firstly, Archie has a nasty temper when things don't work out his way. With the added responsibilities of a household, it may have a tendency to get worse rather than better. Make a point of speaking to him about this failing before the wedding march is played, and save yourself a lot of tears and annoyance. Secondly, he is a man with the courage of his convictions, and he impresses me as one who likes to push his opinions down other people's throats, yours included. Make it very plain to him that you have a mind of your own, and consequently you prefer to do your own thinking. Handle him diplomatically, and you'll be all right.



(Miss Kathlyn T., Boston, Mass.) There is such a gulf between you and your sweetheart I am not surprised you have had trouble with him. What puzzles me most of all is, how in the world did you become such close friends? As far as I can see, Frank's nature is just the antithesis of yours. He is an affectionate, steady-going sort of fellow, who has much more interest in books and learning than in getting married. The latter to him is a secondary consideration. He is very acquisitive, as far as knowledge is concerned, and when all is said and done he is a boy who is to make his mark in the world of business. I grant you that he is temperamental, and some-

STUDY THESE:

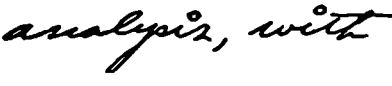
IF YOU ARE A HASTY AND INDISTINCT WRITER—

you are sure to possess much inherent ability. You are an entertaining sort of person, with many distinctive qualities. Such writers are often outstanding authorities in their own particular line of work.

"T" BARS THAT ARE CURVED SUCH AS THESE—

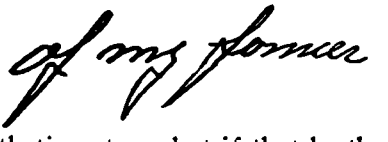
always indicate that the writer is not exactly a "heavy-weight" when it comes to mentality. It denotes a superficial mind, with egotistical tendencies. A person whose imagination runs away with him, and who is given to affectation and display.

IF YOU HAVE A HABIT OF MAKING CIRCLES OVER THE "I"—



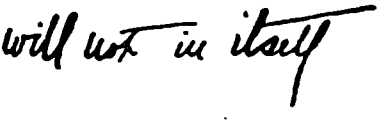
it shows that you are somewhat eccentric, and a strong believer in, and follower of, prevailing fads. Such writers are easily led and influenced by others with stronger wills than their own. It also gives a hint of a certain disturbance of the mind.

IF YOU MAKE YOUR SMALL "F" LIKE THIS—



It is possible that you have a sympathetic nature, but if that be the case, you don't show it very often! Your chief interest in life is too often personal. It also bespeaks a spiteful and vindictive disposition.

WHEN "T" BARS ARE LONG AND CROSS OVER OTHER LETTERS LIKE THESE—

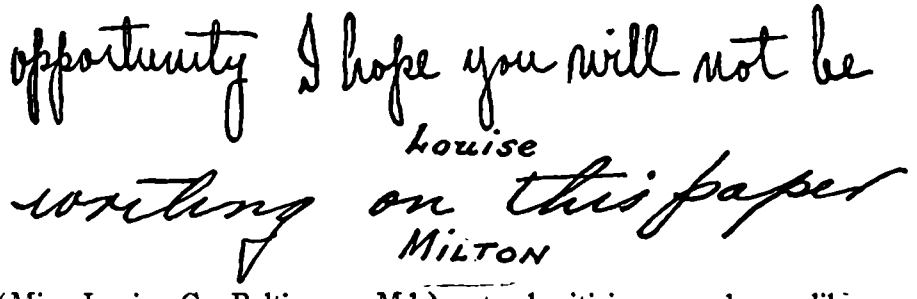


it points to the fact that the writer is unobservant. Such writers look, but see not. A long "T" bar also indicates great impulsiveness.

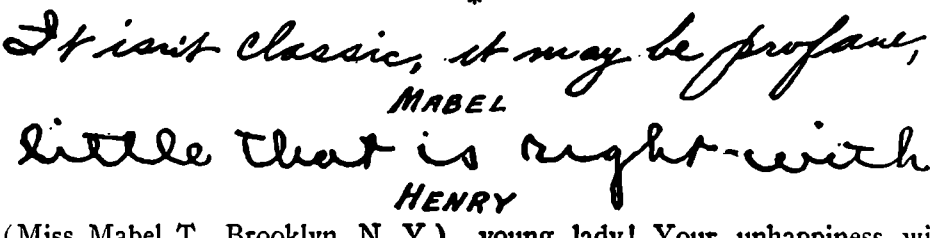
DO YOU JOIN EACH SUCCEEDING LETTER WITHOUT LIFTING YOUR PEN, LIKE THIS?—

If so, you are a person with very logical reasoning powers. You are prudent and sagacious in your business affairs. It also shows that you have a tendency to be skeptical about things you can't comprehend.

times preoccupied with himself. That he has a nasty temper and a rather spiteful nature. That he likes to be mollycoddled and flattered when he does something out of the ordinary. I admit all you say about him in that direction, but nevertheless, Kathlyn, I believe you are the cause of a great deal of this nastiness in his disposition. You have a rather cold and austere exterior. You want him to be bubbling over with enthusiasm all the time while you act the part of the demure maiden. Your likes and dislikes are so pronounced and extreme that in ten years' time you may be nothing but a prim, opinionated mortal that no man would care to have anything to do with. No, Kathlyn, you will either have to change your tactics or give up thinking of Frank. You are not at all suited to each other.



(Miss Louise C., Baltimore, Md.) You give me the impression of being a girl who has a rather cold exterior, though doubtless your heart's in the right place. Milton, it is evident, got down to the kernel of your nature and saw your real worth below the veneer of reserve. I see nothing wrong with you whatever, Louise, when it comes to character and sincerity. You are a straightforward sort of girl, and lean toward the spiritual things of life much more than to the material. Perhaps you have a slight tendency to be vindictive and spiteful. You can't stand criticism, nor do you like correction. Milton, on the other hand, is a fellow who listens to reason. He has his faults as well as you, but he is much more amenable than you are. He is a boy who is out to do big things in the world, and is likely to rise to some important position in his chosen profession. Since you love each other, as you say you do, I would be the last one on earth to spoil a beautiful romance. With a little mental adjusting I think Milton would be very happy with you as his wife. At any rate, I wish you both luck.



(Miss Mabel T., Brooklyn, N. Y.) Mabel, you are a highly conceited young lady! Your unhappiness with Henry is ninety per cent your own

fault. I'm saying this to you in the hope that you'll take a tumble to yourself and come down to earth and be natural. Don't run away with the idea that you are already measured for a harp! You have lots of temper, and always like to have authority. You love to talk about your possessions, such as your wardrobe, and how much money you have in the bank. Now don't misunderstand me, you are a fine girl in some ways. You are very affectionate, and also intelligent. You are cultured and would be fond of good music or poetry. You could be a delightful companion, if you would keep the first personal pronoun "I" out of the conversation. To come to Henry, he is entirely different in temperament and character from you. My humble opinion is you two young folk are not at all suited for each other. You are poles apart in disposition, so what's the use of my pretending that you are anything else?

YOUR CAREER

in things like this

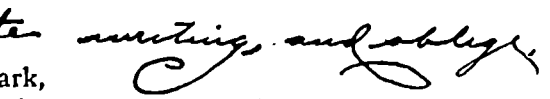
(Miss L. J., Cleveland, Ohio.) Your penmanship reveals to me that you are a quiet, humble-minded litttle girl. Laura, you let people "walk all over you." You would be the better of more backbone, and a little more of the serpent spirit. We are told, you know, to be as harmless as doves, but be as wise as serpents. You have a lot of the dove nature, but precious little of the other kind. To come to your vocation, your analytical brain is specially suited to the study of dietetics. I imagine that food and dieting would appeal to you. This, of course, requires concentrative thought and sound judgment. Your scientific mind also gravitates to accuracy and detail. You have a good business head on your shoulders, and possess straightforward principles. Though you are logical in a certain sense, you leave a lot to your intuition. On the whole, you would make no mistake about giving your attention to the food problems of hungry men and women.

This is the first time I have

(Miss Susan O. C., Denver, Colo.) You impress me as a girl having a very fine mathematical mind. You love to scrutinize small things, and get to the bottom of everything that comes to your notice. In the language of the street, you are "nosy" and inquisitive. A seeker after knowledge. As far as I can see, you have seven very prominent traits. Your memory is excellent. It receives like wax, and retains like iron. Faces and incidents can be recalled by you with ease, and through this wonderful gift you have opportunities surpassing those of many another woman who has had the advantage of a better education than you have had. Then again, I like your reliability. You are a trustworthy girl, whose word is as good as her bond. All this points to the fact that you would be invaluable in a laboratory. As an analytical chemist you would be a "wow." Your love for detail would be the delight of an alchemist whose mind is continually concentrated on the minutiæ. Books and study seem to be the center of attraction with you; social activities don't figure very much in your life. From first to last you are a student who is striving to leave the world a little better than you found it, which, in my opinion, is a wonderful ambition.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

(Miss E. A. N., Elmwood Park, Ill.) You love the world, and the things of the world. Your femininity is scarcely noticeable in your penmanship. You have a man's head on a woman's body. As a consequence, I would call you a born leader, and one who would rather direct than be directed. Dictation from another is like vinegar to your teeth, and your will power is such that nothing could balk you when once you said you would do a job. One of your saving graces is your sense of humor: you do see the funny side of things occasionally, and can enjoy a good story. You are also a woman of taste, which leads me to say that interior decorating is your forte. If I were you I would give my attention to this work, and I'm sure you would find it interesting and remunerative. Whether you should go into business for yourself is another matter, and one which I cannot advise you about at all. This all depends on your circumstances. I would begin slowly if I were you.



(Miss M. F., Boston, Mass.) You have a nature with transparent qualities —easily seen and close to the surface. I discover lots of self-importance in your make-up, with a tendency to display. You are never quite happy unless you are the center of attraction. I would say that you are a very affectionate girl, and enjoy being in men's company. Your shaded writing informs me that you have a rather insistent disposition. You like your own way a little too much for the peace of the home. As a little girl I guess you stampeded all over the house when your mother denied you. You are generous-hearted, though, and would be always ready and willing to do your bit. Patience is no virtue with you. But I believe you are a very diplomatic person. Let me point out that your patronizing nature and your fiery temper are decided hindrances to you from a success point of view.

JOHN FRASER,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway,
New York City.

This coupon is not good after March 22. A stamped addressed envelope must be inclosed when forwarding.

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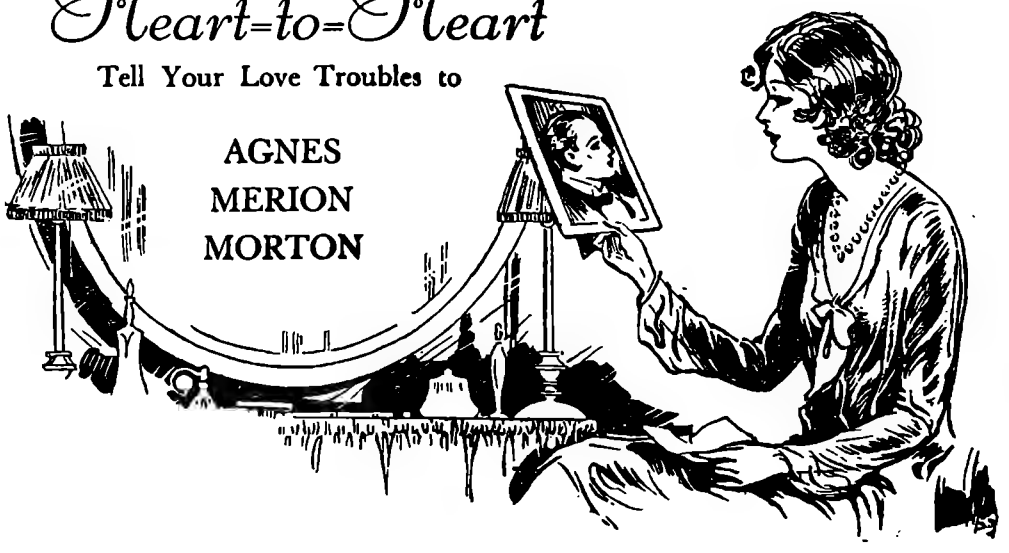


MRS. MORTON wants you to feel that she is a friend—some one to whom it is a comfort to tell your problems, who will advise and encourage you in your struggle for happiness, and who is always here to help. She is interested in you. Write to her freely, addressing your letter care All-Story Magazine, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

Every letter is confidential.

As Mrs. Morton receives so many letters, she cannot publish answers to all in the space allotted to her. Some, therefore, are answered by mail. Be sure to enclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your question.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I would like to make use of your department by asking you for some advice. Is it possible for a man of twenty-two to fall in love with a girl of fifteen? It seems to be with me, but I've never been in love before, so I'm not sure of it.

I board at her mother's and take them both to the movies and other entertainments occasionally, and sometimes take the girl alone. She apparently likes my company, although I can't kid her and chatter with her the way the younger fellows she knows, who go to school with her, do. She seems to find me congenial and to like to go out with me, and I certainly am fond of her. My firm is going to send me to South America for a two-year contract, and I am undecided whether to declare myself or not and to ask her to accompany me. Her mother would not, I am sure, raise any objections. What do you think I should do?

LINDSEY DE B.

I think it is possible for you to love a girl even as young as fifteen, but it is very unlikely that she can be really in love as yet. Look back seven years. Could you have chosen wisely when *you* were fifteen? Or even seventeen or eighteen? Only the most exceptional girl is ready, either mentally or physically, for marriage at fifteen. She is not grown-up; her taste and her character are not really formed. If you were very lucky she might grow up to suit you, but, on the other hand, she might develop in exactly the opposite direction and you would both be miserable.

This chance with your company gives you the very best of all possible opportunities to find out whether your affection for her is merely the result of propinquity or the Real Thing. It will be hard, no doubt, to go away

alone, but it is the fairest thing to her and, eventually, to yourself. It would be better not to bind her even by a promise before you go. There's no reason why you shouldn't tell her you are very "fond" of her, and that you expect to come back to her, however. When you return she will be through school and will have had a little more experience and be a little more likely to know what she wants. You won't regret the time spent apart, and the waiting, for even twenty-five is young enough for a man to marry and it won't hurt either of you to make haste slowly.

I hate to throw cold water. It is a wicked thing for older people to preach down young hearts. But this is what my experience has taught me—the great bulk of early marriages prove disastrous. Remember I've been reading letters about them for several years!

For instance:

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I enjoy reading the letters in ALL-STORY and would like some advice. I have been married a little over two years. I was married when I was sixteen. My husband is ten years my senior. Do you think he is too old for me? We get along perfectly. We have a baby girl whose first birthday will be next month. She's a darling.

My husband thinks I love him, but I don't. I just pretend. Do you think I could go on pretending the rest of my life? My husband loves me dearly. I have never been untrue to him, but I love another. It is a fellow whom I used to keep company with before I married. I really married just to spite him because we had a quarrel and I told him I never wanted to see him again. In the two years I've been married I haven't seen much of him, but I'm sure I love him, since I can't get him off my mind for a moment. Do you think I should keep on pretending for baby's sake, or should I leave? It just seems to me that I can't keep on pretending much longer.

My husband is an operator in a motion picture house and has always made a good salary, but now he talks of buying a little theater in a southern town where he has a cousin who wants to sell out on account of his health. My husband says I would have to help him at first, by working in the box office and running off the records for the news reels, etc. Do you think if he really loves me he would want me to work? Maybe he is just pretending to! Then I would go away where I would not see the one I love every few days, and I don't see how I would bear it. I am almost sure he loves me yet, although he never says so, because when we meet and pass a few words I can almost read it in his eyes. My husband knows him and doesn't like him, but he isn't jealous. He has never showed any jealousy since we have been married. Sometimes I think it would break his heart if I left him, and then again I ask myself if maybe he doesn't love some one else, too, and that is why he isn't jealous. Please give me some kind of advice.

ALLIE MAE.

Oh, girls, girls! Why will you rush into marriage before you know what it is going to mean? You wouldn't think of crossing a railroad track without pausing to "stop, look, and listen!"

But, Allie, I cannot advise you to leave such a good husband. You married so early that you would probably be dissatisfied for a period with anybody. No, your husband is not too old for you. It is fortunate that he, at least, was old enough to know what he was doing. You would have no reason for a divorce. He is not abusive, nor a drunkard, nor unfaithful to you, and he supports you and your baby.

If you quarreled with this boy before marriage it is more than likely that you would have quarreled afterward, and you can't always believe what a man says with his lips, so why pin any faith to what you imagine you "read in his eyes"? You can stop daydreaming about him if you will only get something else with which to occupy your mind, and the motion-picture business, which you could share with your husband, sounds like the ideal thing. It will be good for you to go where you won't see that other so much. And your husband is not jealous because he trusts and respects you—it is a fine trait.

I admire him for wanting to go into business for himself instead of working all his life on a salary. It is not every man who has either so much ambition or such a good opportunity, and you ought to be glad to help him. You can no doubt get an excellent southern "mammy" to look after your house and the baby while you are busy elsewhere, and it seems to me that your life will be an unusually interesting one. You will have something to think about—something constructive instead of vain regrets. You will be making use of your time instead of wasting it. To help in the box office and in the theater when necessary; to help in the selection of pictures, too, because you have the woman's point of view and to please the women in your audiences will be a big factor in your success. Why, Allie, I think you are fortunate beyond most women, especially since you have found a husband with whom you can get along "perfectly."

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am a girl of eighteen and am away at school. I have dark eyes and black hair. At home I have a young man friend who is very dear to me. He has asked me to marry him, but I asked for a few months to decide. That was when I was home for the Christmas vacation. He now writes and wants my answer right away, or at least when I go home for spring vacation.

Since I came up here I have fallen in love with a very charming young man. He has money and a car and can afford a nice home, while Carl (my home town friend) has very little money. I hate to break his heart for Bill, but I really do love Bill better. Bill talks love and marriage to me, too, and I would like to know what you advise.

LORETTA.

Even if you were engaged to Carl you should not marry him, feeling as you do, and fortunately the situation is less complicated than it would be if you were engaged. You should write to him at once and say that you are at last sure that you do not love him enough to marry him, fond as you are of him. Say that you realize now that if the answer had been going to be "yes," you would not have needed to think it over. You don't have to say anything about Bill. And if Bill, too, wants to be taken seriously, I'd advise you to ask him to wait a little and give you both a chance to be sure you really want each other.

Here is another girl who has got herself into a tangle with two boys:

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

Hal and I have known each other since we were kids and always got along fine. He is about six feet tall, good-looking and friendly. We have been going together steadily for a year now. But here's where the trouble starts. Last summer I spent my vacation with my girl friend in another State. While I was there I met John and it was love at first sight for us both. We had a wonderful time, being always together. I never mentioned the boy at home, so John thought I was free to listen to what he had to tell me. The day before I left for home he asked me to marry him. I told him I would tell mother about it and be back; I also promised to be true to him while I was away.

But what do you suppose mother did? She had a fit as soon as she heard his name—he was born in a foreign country, although he has lived in America ever since he was eight months old. I tried to reason with her, but all in vain. John wrote long letters to me, always telling of his love. Mother wouldn't let me go back and then she talked me into going with Hal again. Then she wrote John and told him I was engaged and had been all the time—this isn't strictly true, although we were always understood to be engaged. It broke John up. He left his home and friends and it was a long time before I found out, by accident, where he had gone. Then he answered my letter—with such a sad and lonely one. It made me feel worse, if anything could have, than I did before, because he did not reproach me at all and, of course, he might have said this and that about it. He has always admired the truth and it made him feel so bad to have some one he trusted lie to him. I don't blame him, do you? What can I do? I am nearly mad, thinking of him. My friends tell me to forget him and be glad I have some one like Hal to love me. He would do anything to see me happy, but I often think love must be blind if he can't see how unhappy I am. I can't tell Hal about John. It would break his heart, and I can't let any one else be unhappy on account of me.

I like Hal and think he is wonderful. Do you think love would come in later years? But how am I to forget John? He still loves

me, but he says he doesn't even want me to write to him as long as I keep Hal from knowing about him. He says it isn't fair to Hal, and all of us do not have to suffer for one thing.

UNHAPPY GIRL.

You should tell Hal by all means. I wish I could make you young girls understand that you are much more likely to " break a man's heart " by deceiving him than by telling the truth. Suppose he hears all this from some one else, distorted and garbled as another person's version would doubtless be? Let him know the whole story, just as it happened, just what your mother did, everything. He would rather know than be kept in the dark, I am sure.

And if John stays true to you, and you do not succeed in forgetting him, perhaps your mother will become reconciled in time. After all, if she has not one thing against him except his foreign parentage she may learn some day just how narrow a prejudice that is. Some of the finest men in this country were born on foreign soil.

If Hal has the good sense I think he has, he would not want you while you care for another man, and perhaps when your mother sees that you and he don't go together any more she will let you invite John to come and visit you and see if she does not like him better in person than she now thinks possible.

Puzzled Nineteen—Just how real is your ambition to become a nurse? Is it only an idea you have, or do you know what the training would involve? Do you know a registered nurse well enough to talk to her about the details? The first year in the hospital is very difficult for the novice. She is given the most disagreeable and distasteful tasks at the start—the idea being, apparently, to discourage the faint-hearted, the sooner the better. If you thoroughly understand what you would be in for, and are undaunted by it; if, moreover, you are endowed with unusual physical strength and endurance, there is no profession open to women which compares with that of nursing. It is, at the same time, a great service to suffering humanity and lucrative to the trained worker. Fix your heart on it and sooner or later you will persuade your parents that you are serious in your ambition. Meanwhile, try not to let either one of the young men interfere with your happiness. I'm afraid your father is right about the older one, and the other treats you too cavalierly to be worthy of your interest. People who are so inconsiderate of the feelings of their friends do not, as a rule, turn out to be very thoughtful toward their life-companions.

Only Bettie—The best thing for you to do would be to have nothing more to say to these women, except to pass the time of day pleasantly when you meet them unavoidably. If you don't want to be treated as they treat you, you will have to refrain from being intimate with them. Somewhere you will find the kind of friends you want, but they will not come to you while you are known to travel in such company.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I wish I could afford to get ALL-STORY every issue, but I cannot do that, for I have been sick in this hospital with TB for six years. But it makes me very happy when I can get one, and especially when I find one among the magazines that have been sent to us by kind friends. To-day I was reading Puzzled's letter and I wish you would let me write a few words to her. Mrs. Puzzled, I feel very sorry for you. You married against your people's wishes and I do believe there are lots of young girls the same way—they do not take their parents' advice and then they are sorry for it afterward.

There would be more happy families if young girls would listen to their father and mother.

Now, Puzzled, my advice to you is to tell your sad story to the courts and not to a man who, you think, feels for you "friendship only." You say that he could afford to help you and the kiddies without his wife's being any the wiser. Puzzled, I do think that if this man was true to his wife and loved her he wouldn't talk like that to you. If he truly had any sympathy for you he would tell his wife, and they would help you together. So, Puzzled, and other girls, too, never believe what men tell you and what they will do for you, married or single.

If you think this little business which you have in mind is the thing for you, I would ask the bank.

JOSEPH J. S.

The last letter I am leaving unanswered because the writer wants other women who have faced the same or similar problems to write to her and tell her how they managed.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

Many times I have been tempted to write to you, but have never had the courage to lay bare the tragedy of my life. I was married when I was but fifteen and a half years old, to a boy I thought I really loved with all my heart. Sometimes, now, I think it was only infatuation. My parents, especially my father, objected strenuously, and to this day my regret is that I did not heed them.

Three months after my marriage my husband left me for two weeks, after which he returned. I still loved him dearly, so I quickly forgave him. We were living with my parents, who had reconciled themselves to the inevitable. It was just two months before my little girl was born that one morning he left for work as usual. That night he did not return. We had had no quarrel, so I could not imagine what had happened. My one thought was that he had been injured or killed. A week of sleepless nights and anguish followed, then another, during which all our efforts to find trace of him were in vain. Then his brother took pity on my condition and confided to his wife, who told me, that my husband had enlisted in the army and was at Fort Slocum. The next day I hurried to the fort, only to be informed that my husband had been transferred to the South and from there he was to go to France. I was told to write to the commander of the camp, and I did, but received no reply.

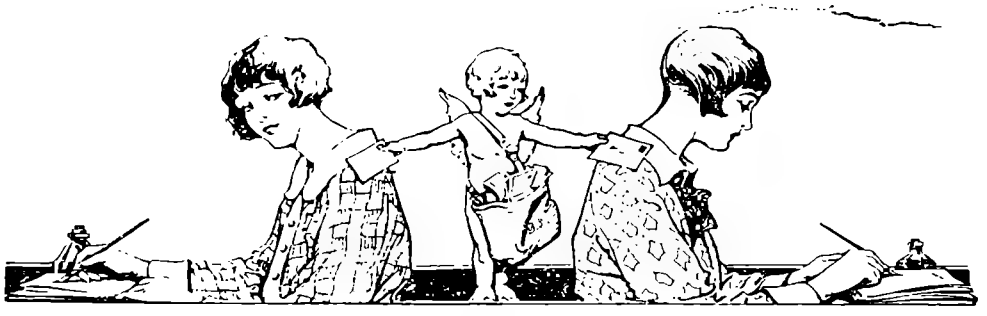
Then one day my mother went to see his brother and came back with a letter from my husband, who was already in France. The shock was more than I could bear and two days later my darling little girl was born. She lived eighteen hours. His letters to me all pleaded and begged me to get him out, and as he had enlisted under false representation, such as being a single man and giving a false name, it was possible to do so, but it took me eight long months before I succeeded.

I had thought he would change, but no. We had furnished a little dream home on the installment plan and lived happily three months, when he lost his job and with it his nerve. He disappeared again, leaving me to face the disgrace and shame of having the furniture taken away—everything we had put into it gone—under my very eyes. With each piece those men took away it seemed to me that they were taking a part of my very life with them. Still when he came back I again forgave him because God was to bless me with another darling baby. But again two months before its birth he deserted me, and when the boy was born he did not even come to see me. But when he came to me again I had to forgive him, as I now had a baby to take care of. And so it has gone on. I have had two homes and he has broken them up, and I have had to go back to my parents. It is they who have supported me nearly all the time I am married. It is they who have paid all the expenses when my babies were born. I now have two living.

Dear Mrs. Morton, I know you will say that in a way they are right, but, oh, shouldn't parents stick to their children, especially when they are in trouble and have gone through as much suffering as I have? Now my husband has left me for the ninth and last time. I have made up my mind that, no matter what happens to me, I will never go back to him again. My father says that he can no longer support the children and myself, that I must go from the house. I have a grown-up brother who is always telling me to get out. My husband has never sent me any money while he was away, and I suppose it will be the same now. The only thing I can think of to do is to put the children away in a home. I am soon to become a mother again and I don't know what in the world I am going to do with it. Oh, Mrs. Morton, why doesn't God give babies to those who want and can take care of them? I love my children—only God knows how I love them—but what am I to do? It is for them that I have sacrificed myself so many times—I thought it was for their good.

Mrs. Morton, I intend to give the baby that is to come away for adoption into some good Jewish home. I am hoping that you can help me. I am sure my husband will not have anything to say when he comes back, as he has never shown the slightest interest in them. He has no fatherly feeling for them, neither has he any love for me, although I am still young and some people call me pretty. I am twenty-six years old, but in spite of all I have been through I look only twenty-one or two. Please, oh, please tell me what to do. I am inclosing a stamped envelope so you can answer me soon. If you want to you may print this letter, and I would like other women to write to me, but please ask them to write through the magazine, for by the time it comes out I do not know where I shall be.

SADIE.



The Lonesome Club

Conducted by DOROTHEA DALE

MAKE friends! Join the Lonesome Club and soon you will be getting more letters than any one you know.

Here's how to do it: if you wish your letter published in these pages write to Mrs. Dale, care of ALL-STORY, *280 Broadway, New York City, and describe yourself. Try to make it as interesting as possible—tell little things about yourself that will make others want to write to you.*

If you wish to communicate with the pals whose letters appear here, inclose your letter in a plain, stamped envelope and send it to Mrs. Dale. No letters will be forwarded without the extra stamp.

If you are a girl, you may write to other girls; if a man, to other men.

Please do not ask for the address of any one.

A Country Pal

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I am a constant reader of ALL-STORY and think it is a great book. I have read every issue so far, except one which I was not able to get.

I am twenty years old, five feet four inches tall, weigh one hundred and twenty-five pounds; have blue eyes, fair complexion and dark brown curly hair. Some say I am rather nice-looking, though I am not bragging about myself. I would like to hear from other readers of this magazine, of my age or older, it does not make much difference. I live in the country. There's not much amusement out here, so it gets quite lonesome sometimes. Thanks for your new department. I think I will like it very much.

KATHLENE OF ALABAMA.

Have You Had Her Experience?

TO THE READERS OF ALL-STORY:

I would love to hear from girls who have had my experience in life. I was married when I was just sixteen. I have been married two years this March. My husband and I never lived together after a few months, because I love to dance and he didn't, and he didn't want me to dance. I hope whoever reads this will write and tell me her experience, especially any one that loves to dance.

A PAL—BOBBIE.

She's a Business Girl

DEAR MRS. DALE:

Will some one please write to a lonely stenographer who is twenty-two years old, about five feet nine, dark brown hair and eyes, who likes music and various sports? I will answer all letters and would like to exchange snapshots.

FERNE OF NEBRASKA.

She Does Radio Broadcasting

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I've been a constant reader of ALL-STORY ever since I first saw it, five months ago. I really do enjoy every story in the magazine. Now that you are going to have this department I know I am going to find some friends through your aid. I am of Jewish faith, five feet four inches tall. Have brown hair and hazel eyes. I'm fond of reading, writing letters and music. I play the piano fairly well and sing. Have done a bit of radio broad-

casting, too. I would love to hear from any one whether they are interested in my interests or not. Thank you in advance for the help in finding the friends that I know you are going to give me.

CELIA OF NEW YORK.

Wants Foreign Pals

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I am a lonely reader of ALL-STORY. I live on a farm and take care of my mother, so cannot go anywhere or make many friends. I am twenty-five years old, rather tall and slim, have red-blond hair and gray eyes. I like all kinds of sports, including dancing and baseball. I would like friends from far-away places, also from the Western States, near my age. Hoping to receive a mailbox of mail,

GRACE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE.

An All-round Good Sport

Here's hoping I may gain lots of pen friends through your department. I'm not lonely and have loads of friends, but can one ever have too many? I am twenty-one, tall and slender, married almost two years, and a brunette, with dark brown curly hair, fair complexion and gray-green eyes. I love to dance—have won a few prizes for dancing—like to swim, read, attend shows, drive a car and oh, just lots of things. My husband and I live with my parents now, so I have lots of time to write. Please, every one, get busy and write to me. I'll promise a quick reply, and don't believe my letters will bore you. I'd like to hear from single girls as well as married ones. Here's hoping they have to put an extra mailman on our route to help carry my mail!

JUST PEGGY.

She Has Traveled

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I am reading my first copy of ALL-STORY and like it so well. There are many real helps in the correspondence pages . . . I read them all. I kept wondering as I read page after page—for I began at the back of the magazine—if you would introduce me to some new friends.

I am in Long Beach, California, and I must say it is one of the hardest places in the world to meet folks who are glad for new friends. I think there are many lovely and kind friends for us all over the world if we can only get on their "wire," if not actually meet them. I will give you a little idea about myself, and hope I may have the pleasure of meeting some nice folks through your efforts. However, I have already learned not to be disappointed if no one writes, for I realize I am not one of the younger set, even though I feel like it and enjoy things.

My one trouble is that I don't meet many who are interested in learning anything after they get to be forty. I am not a crank on education—some of the loveliest characters are uneducated. But I like to meet people who are progressive. I keep up my end with fourteen correspondents, so will consider new friends and endeavor to do my part. I am forty-five, a widow, tall, hazel eyes and dark hair, dress well and have a pretty fair education. I am an artist. I know something of numerology and a little of cerebral psychology—that of reading character, generally by the head. I try to be balanced and broad-minded. I love children and am interested in so many things, but don't play cards. I am very lonely and certainly would like to meet or correspond with new people. I am fond of *sincere* people, though I guess we all are, but my friends mean everything to me. I love farm life and can tell a great deal about city life, having lived nearly always in the large cities. I have traveled from Alaska to Mexico, and from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Well, I guess that ought to be enough! Please, Mrs. Dale, print part of this letter. Maybe the One—or Ones—will answer it and I may be of service in just my little way to some one. I just love to help people. I am also a nurse. I am acting as nurse and companion now to an elderly lady. Hoping to her from folks and success be to you in your department.

M. C. H.

Here's a Peppy Pal

DEAR MRS. DALE:

Gee, I think it's great that you're going to have a department for making friends by mail! Here's hoping I shall find loads—some who would love to have a black-curly-headed, blue-eyed friend. Do you think I could actually get one? Here's what my mug looks like. Some people say I have a heart-shaped face—of course, I don't believe everything they say, but anyway I've black hair, large eyes, medium complexion, some teeth, of course, and I'm also five feet three and weigh a hundred and ten pounds. I'm eighteen and a senior in high school, go to all the dances, and do I like to dance? Oh, boy! I love it. I do like to read some—oh, I like everything in sports. I can even play the uke—and how! I'm just crazy to write to a friend I've never seen, will also exchange snapshots.

H. OF WEST VIRGINIA.

Another S. O. S. to Cleveland

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I'm a young woman thirty-one years old. I am tall, five feet ten. I've been married for six years. Now here's the trouble—I want a girl friend, some one to talk to. I used to work in one of the big banks in our city until I got married, and all my friends are married, too, and are so far away that they are no good now. They don't even have time to write, so they say. And also since that time I've lost my hearing a little bit, which makes it hard for me to make friends. I get so lonesome I don't know what to do

with myself. I even feel like jumping in the lake and ending it all. It just seems as though no one cares for a hard-of-hearing person. I'm not bad on looks. I have blue eyes and dark hair, with a fair complexion. But if I meet any one and they talk so I can't hear them well, I can't answer them, and they look at me as if I'm a fool and never come round again. I'm not so terrible bad—it's only when people talk low that I can't get them. And it seems as though everybody talks low!

I love music and books and the movies, even the talkies because I get them sometimes. I love the radio. I have one and wouldn't do without it. But I wish I had some one to drop in and talk to me, some one who would like to, not just because they have no other place to go. If you can help me I'll bless you forever. Because it's awful to spend your days all by yourself. My husband works so I can't look for help from him. As I saw your ad in ALL-STORY, which I love to read, I thought I'd ask your help, so here I am.

MRS. WM. S.

P. S. I have no children.

Another Musical Lady

DEAR MRS. DALE:

I saw your advertisement of lonely readers in ALL-STORY, through which I would like to have some friends. I am a girl of eighteen years of age, have brown hair and brown eyes, wear large-rimmed glasses. I am five feet four and am a cripple, although I can play basket ball and dance. I also play the violin and am leader in the high school orchestra. I am very anxious to hear from some homebody friends.

A FRIEND IN NEVADA.

Please Write to Us!

Every day when the mail-man comes around, we look eagerly for personal correspondence from our readers. The happiest moments of our busy day are those in which we receive letters from friends we have never seen—girls who write what they really think of ALL-STORY magazine.

If you're too busy to write a letter, just fill out this coupon and mail it. *Thank you!*

THE EDITORS,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

Here is my opinion of the stories in this issue:

The Unkept Tryst.....

The Marriage Trap.....

Love at West Point.....

Redeemed by Love.....

Frat Pins for Rent.....

The Bride's Fate.....

Love's Branding Iron.....

Moonbeam Girl.....

Message of a Rose.....

My favorite authors are .....

Name .....

Address .....

(Name and address may be omitted, if desired)

Beauty For You

By FERNE CHANDLER

BEAUTY results from attention to the little things. Follow faithfully the beauty hints given in this department and you will be delighted with the results.

If there is any question about your personal appearance that you would like to ask Miss Chandler, address her care ALL-STORY, *280 Broadway, New York City.*

Be sure to inclose a stamped, addressed envelope with each question.

I OFTEN wonder if we are a lazy bunch of mortals, or if we do not know *how* to keep our hair clean and lovely. One sees so many girls with dandruff, stringy, oily or dead-looking hair.

It is necessary to shampoo the hair frequently. The only possible harm in shampooing your hair three times a week, if it needs it, is in the rinsing and drying. Hair must be carefully rinsed of all soap particles and thoroughly dried.

Select any good toilet soap or shampoo liquid. Liquids are easier to use, and less apt to lodge in the hair. You can make a liquid out of any bar of soap by shaving it into two cups of cold water and placing this in a saucepan to simmer over a slow fire till dissolved. Strain, bottle and it is ready to use when you want it.

Another good liquid shampoo is made by mixing four ounces of green soap, four ounces of alcohol and one ounce of rosemary tincture.

It is well to give time and thought to your comb and brush. Both should be cleansed twice a week, with soap and water, the lather containing a small amount of ammonia. If you have dandruff it is well to sterilize them once a week in a solution of one pint of water to a teaspoonful of formalin. This will not hurt the brush or comb and it dislodges all alien particles.

The favorite cry after a shampoo is "I just washed my hair, and I can't do a thing with it!" Two or three good brushings will stimulate the scalp so its oils will make the hair quite manageable. If the natural oils of your scalp do not flow freely, and you dislike applying oil to the scalp, wet the hair well with a solution of seventy per cent alcohol to thirty per cent olive or castor oil. The alcohol will evaporate immediately and leave just enough oil through your hair to make it soft.

If, on the other hand, your hair is extremely oily, a tablespoon of bicarbonate of soda in the final rinsing

water will cut away the greasy substance. If the oil is too stubborn for the soda, then saturate the hair with alcohol and wipe it off before it has time to dry into the hair. This must be done quickly, and best results are gained if the hair is done in sections.

Split or broken hair ends are always cause for annoyance. Either your hair is too dry or has been injured in some way. Hair curling is the general cause of split ends—use cloth-covered curlers, or if you must use an iron be sure it is not too hot.

To eliminate split ends merely clip them off with a sharp scissors just beyond the break. Singeing is a method I do not approve of. The theory is that singeing prevents the natural hair oils from escaping, but we know these days that a hair placed under a microscope shows nothing but a hollow tube-like shell, and any oils or fluids of the hair come from the scalp.

If your split ends are caused by heat or artificial hair coloring causing dryness, massage the scalp firmly, but not roughly, with castor or olive oil or vaseline.

If you want a salve that will brighten faded hair and yet not change its color here is a splendid one:

Oil of almond	3 ounces
Oil of rosemary	1 ounce
Oil of mace	35 drops

Rub this into the scalp every night for restoring the luster.

I have tried in the space allotted me to give you as many basic pointers on the care of the hair as possible. There are a great many more hints to give, of course, about dandruff, falling hair, various kinds of shampoo, and so forth, but these will have to come in a future issue.

I am gratified at the number of letters I receive. It shows my readers are truly interested in the cultivation of beauty and are striving to make themselves attractive to those around them. Do not hesitate to write me about any big or little problems that confront you. I want to help all I can.

DEAR MISS CHANDLER:
I have a very oily skin that I simply can't seem to correct. Can you help me?
ANN BARRY,
Providence, R. I.

Presuming you have tried cosmetic aids without success, I would suggest you watch your diet, avoiding excess coffee or tea drinking, starchy foods, rich gravies or sauces, fatty meats and fried foods. Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits. Salad once or twice a day, without the heavy dressings—try salt or lemon juice instead. Drink a glass of hot water with a tablespoon or so of lemon juice in it each morning upon arising. For breakfast try drinking milk and orange juice instead of coffee. I think this will help in a short time. While you are waiting for the diet to right this condition, try dipping a piece of cotton in some massage alcohol and rubbing it gently over the skin.

DEAR MISS CHANDLER:
Can you tell me what to do? My hair is so oily! And just about this time every year it seems to fall out in handfuls.
KATHERINE FULLER,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Your answer to the first question is given in detail in this issue. Your second question I'll take up next time.

ALL-STORY'S HALL OF FAME

Beulah Poynter

CHARMING Beulah Poynter tells her story in her own words. She ought to know how to tell stories, her own or those of other girls, because she has been writing since she was in her early teens. Remember "Remembered Rapture" and "Cinderella on Broadway"?

"I first saw the light of day," Beulah says, "in a little Missouri town. They tell me my hair was red at birth, but if it was I soon lost it and have been blonde ever since.

"Being blessed with a grandmother who had traveled all over the world and who was something of a writer, I early became interested in literature. But I was always torn between two ambitions—to be a great writer or a great actress?

"Then I went on the stage, and for many years I starred in plays written by and for myself! Also played in motion pictures.

"But the strongest of my two ambitions proved to be writing, and I soon took up magazine writing in earnest. At first I wrote only short stories, but with the publishing of my first serial I got the fever, and have done innumerable serials since. A lot of them are now published in book form.

"This in addition to any number of plays which have been produced—among the number 'One Way Street,' which was seen on Broadway last year.

"My hobby is traveling. Of course, I love the theater—but I care nothing for sports of any kind. I've covered a good part of the globe, picking up material for my stories that way.

"I am married. Oh, yes! To a theatrical manager. I'm afraid I'm an indifferent housekeeper, but I rather enjoy cooking at times.

"And—let's see—I would rather write stories about the theater than any other type. I started as a chorus girl myself, and learned every branch of the show business before I became a star.

"It feels quite natural to be writing for a magazine published by the Munsey organization, because I sold my first short story to the old *Munsey's!*"

Watch for the life story of Madeleine S. Buchanan in the next issue.